

Black & Gay Today: Experiences with Perceived Racial and Sexual Orientation
Microaggressions in Predominately White Colleges and Universities

Jerrod L. Handy

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
The Chicago School of Professional Psychology
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

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Abstract

More salient than ever before are the many inequities in education due to lowered expectations, stereotypes, and microaggressive environments. There is limited literature which explores Black gay males' experiences with the intersections of race, gender, and sexual identity in institutions of higher education. This study explored the intersection of racial and sexual orientation identity, racial and sexual orientation microaggressions, and academic persistence among Black gay cisgender male graduate students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). This study also detailed the perceived impact of microaggressions on Black gay cisgender males in higher education. The research questions considered were (1) to what extent do Black gay male graduate students at a PWI experience racial and sexual orientation microaggressions while on campus or in the classroom, and (2) is there a relationship between microaggressive experiences and academic persistence. After transcription, coding, and analysis, nine major themes emerged: (1) Microaggressive Experiences, (2) Isolation, (3) Interactions with School Administration, (4) Mentors and Role Models, (5) Interactions with Peers, Staff, and Faculty of Color, (6) Interactions with White Peers, Staff, and Faculty, (7) Role as an Educator, (8) Intersectionality, and (9) Self-Awareness and Self-Perception. The five minor themes also emerged: (1) Connectedness, (2) Code Switching, (3) Support and Guidance, (4) Not Meeting Preconceived Notions, and (5) Impact on Academic Performance.

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Chapter 1: Nature of the Study

This study was conceptualized and intended to explore the perceptions of Black gay men of racial and sexual orientation microaggressions within higher education at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), which are institutions of higher learning in which the majority student population is White (Lett & Wright, 2003). According to an increasing amount of research, it has become ever more apparent that many inequalities in education are often linked to stereotypes, lower expectations, and a climate that is repeatedly hostile and invalidating towards minorities such as women, people of color, and individuals who identify LGBTQ (Sue, 2010a). One form of implicit attitudes is often characterized by microaggressions. Sue (2010a) qualitatively defined microaggressions as transient daily interactions that convey disparaging messages towards designated groups such as Black gay males, homosexuals, and individuals living with disabilities. Sue (2010a), using a qualitative methodology, labeled microaggressions as being “inherently elusive and often revealed in the form of nonverbal, verbal, visual, or behavioral cues” (p. 107). Because microaggressions are often reflexive and unconscious, the person who conveys them often does not realize that they are conveying such message. Strikingly, microaggressions routinely typify the unconscious and the embedded biased values, beliefs, and attitudes others harbor. Ultimately, microaggressions are more likely to present themselves when people make that difference do not exist, which in-turn allows that person to mitigate the importance of race, gender, or sexual orientation (Nadal, 2013; Sue, 2010a).

As noted by Herriott and Evans (2004), LGBT students and their concerns have become increasingly more visible on college campuses. Despite the increased interest, LGBT individuals and students are continually subjected to negative attitudes, harassment, and violence in society and on campuses (Liang & Alimo, 2005; Ligris & Share, 2004; Taulke-Johnson, 2008).

Draughn, Elkins, and Roy (2002) noted that although college campuses are commonly seen as

safe environments for students, the actuality is quite different such it is an “uninviting at best and treacherous, at worst, terrain for lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students” (p. 10). For LGBT students, navigating an already hostile environment can not only tax students emotionally and psychologically, but it can elicit a sense of duplicity wherein everything is called into question. Recently, Fox and Ore (2010) wrote about the impact of alienation and high dropout rates, experiences of violence, substance abuse, and suicide rates among LGBT college students. Although an increasing amount of literature is being produced about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and to a lesser degree about transgendered students (LGBT), it remains limited to the study of White gay male students. Jones and Love stated that “White gay men, much like White heterosexuals, have been socialized to believe that they are the norm for (gay) society” (Harris, 2003, p. 48).

It is conceivable to hypothesize that Black gay males might experience the compounding, and perhaps negative, impacts of identifying with dual minority statuses while also engaged in higher education. Black gay men often express the concern that members of other racial groups do not actually know their experience or obstacles they endured while pursuing higher education at PWIs (Nadal, 2013). This is true whether the racism is manifested by an act such as being passed over for promotion or through the negative feelings associated with the misrepresentation and negative reporting about African American men in the media.

The challenge for Black gay men lies in the constant balancing of how to exist competently within multiple identity statuses. LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) discussed the factors that contribute to simultaneously obtaining competence in being a part of both a dominant culture such as academia and a minority culture. They argued for a bicultural competence model and the importance of bicultural efficacy, or individual confidence in living

effectively in two cultures without compromising one's sense of cultural identity. They stated that bicultural competence necessitates being grounded by social networks in both cultures. However, racial and sexual orientation slights not only serve as social status cues and benchmarks, but the subtle offenses are often emotionally taxing, anxiety producing, and anger inducing. Furthermore, such slights can elicit a sense of disconnection, ambiguousness, and invisibility.

For Black gay males, managing the stress that arises during cross-racial encounters can be burdensome, demanding and distracting from academic focus (Sue, 2010b), as such individuals sometime enact a change in their behaviors in order to gain acceptance (i.e., code switching). As noted by Boulton (2016), code switching is regarded as a speaker's adjustment in their vocabulary, pitch, volume, rhythm, stress, and/or tonal quality to better align with the perceived expectations of their listeners or to conform to the context of the perceived roles and relative social status given the interaction. The changes in behavior can often be consistent with one's personal world view and identity, or they can elicit dissonance or discomfort which would then necessitate a reconciliation of beliefs. This dissonance perpetuates the negative connotation often experienced by Black gay males and is often experienced as a lack of integration with their environment (Sue, 2010b). If an individual makes an adjustment in behavior with the belief that it will bring greater acceptance, yet he or she is rejected because undesired group attributes are judged more salient, such encounters are viewed as counterintuitive and can create confusion about the appropriate or socially desired path to genuine acceptance. Rather than endure, or remain persistent, Black gay male might resort to removing themselves from hostile environments, be they academic or otherwise.

As such, the retention of African Americans in higher education has been a critical topic for the past three decades (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Thompson, Gorin, Obeidat, & Chen, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In the US, a college degree has often been ascribed the meaning of being a means of achieving a better life, as well being an avenue in which one could obtain a perceived level of recognition and status. However, for minorities, including Black gay men, navigating higher education and attaining the privileges associated with degrees has been documented to be anything but simple or straightforward (Sue, 2010b).

Problem Statement

Black gay males are a visibly distinct growing population which has, through marginalization and other historical and societal factors, been denied recognition, comprehension, and appreciation (Miller, 2007). This particular community is a unique sub-set of the mainstream culture, which has created its own social, emotional, economic, and political identity. Although research relevant to sexual orientation has grown extensively, the population of focus has been primarily White lesbian or gay males and females.

The previous section introduced a unique concern that relates to the retention of Black gay males in higher education and the roles that racism and sexual identity play in promulgating the achievement gap. Additionally, research has shown that there is a relationship between certain dimensions of racial identity, increased exposure, vulnerability, and chronic racism (Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, Schmeelk-Cone, Chavous, & Zimmerman, 2004; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Some researchers have found that a strong identification with one's racial group can lessen the impact of discrimination and serve as a protective component for education (Chavous et al., 2003). Conversely, other researchers have argued that there is little to no direct relationship between academic achievement and racial

identity, and that academic achievement is largely predicated on the institutional contexts in which students are negotiating (Davidson, 1996). There is limited research on this relationship (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), as well as on how Black gay male students' responses to racial microaggressions on campus or in the classrooms of PWIs are moderated by racial and sexual orientation identity. Unfortunately, because Black gay men identify with dual minority statuses, they face both racial and sexual orientation microaggressions in the classroom, and while the impact of this can be detrimental to students there is little research on how students cope with these microaggressive behaviors.

It is possible that because Black gay men experiences with an inordinate amount of stress related to racism, homophobia and heterosexism, and lack of social supports while attending PWIs might be reflected in decreased rates of graduation from institutions of higher learning at rates far less than their White gay and straight male counterparts. Given the difficulties they may face at PWIs, their ways of finding social support, approaching difficulties, and ultimately persisting to graduate highlights an example of resiliency and coping. As such, endeavoring to understand the lived experience Black gay male graduate students is critical for increasing the likelihood of continuance for other individuals who identify with multiple minority statuses. Conversely, there exists scant research bridging the gap regarding Black gay males and their persistence and experience through higher education. The scientific community has failed to provide research which looks at how Black gay males: perceive, acknowledge, or experience microaggressions, deal or have dealt with racism (implicit or explicit), and importantly perceive themselves when faced with the compounding dilemma of homophobia, discrimination, and racism.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and assess the perceived impact of racial and sexual orientation microaggressions of Black gay males in higher education. Sue (2010a) outlined and described three aspects which comprise the various forms of microaggressions. Microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation have been identified as the three main types on microaggressions. Microassault often times relates to an obvious attack (either verbal, nonverbal, or environmental) with the intentions of projecting biased and prejudiced attitudes (Sue, 2010a). Microinsults are either verbal/nonverbal or environmental indications that projects offensiveness, insensitivity, and insults towards a targeted person's racial, sexual orientation, or gender identity (Sue, 2010a). Microinvalidations, also often unconscious expressions, are perhaps the most devious of all other forms because they openly berate and contradict the realistic actualities of socially targeted groups (Sue, 2010a). According to Constantine and Sue (2007), when internalized, microaggressions can cause shame, physical and mental distress, a reduction in goal directedness, and a feeling of only being able to attain or obtain comparatively less. Understanding the significance and impact of microaggressions is important because it provides an evidence based structure for understanding and categorizing modern forms of racism.

More salient than ever before are the many inequities in education due to lower expectations, stereotypes, and a microaggressive environment for people of color (Sue, 2010b). Studies have quantified the impact of many of these inequities due to the invalidating nature of microaggressions; however, the perceptions of these inequities and their impact have not yet been qualified by the voices of Black gay males (Sue, 2010b).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Black gay men graduate from institutions of higher learning at rates far less than their White male and Black female counterparts (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Black gay males may also experience an inordinate amount of stress related to racism, homophobia, and heterosexism, as well as a lack of social supports while attending PWIs. Given the difficulties they may face at PWIs, their ways of finding social support, approaching difficulties, and ultimately persisting until graduation provide an example of resiliency and coping. In essence, understanding their experiences thus becomes critical for increasing the likelihood of persistence among other Black gay males, and other sexual minority students and students of color. This study focused on Black gay male students who are currently enrolled in graduate level programs and have completed at least their first term or semester. The study explored the challenges Black gay males graduate students face because of intersecting minority statuses. Specifically, this study examined students' perceptions of how race, sexual orientation, role as a student influenced their experiences at a PWI. In addition, the study explored the role of involvement on the part of the student and institution, peer-to-peer interactions, and available and accessible resources.

Theoretical Framework

In addition to general theories of identity development, particular theories have explored gender identity, racial identity, and sexual orientation. This study explored the lived experiences of Black gay men who are currently enrolled in a graduate program at a PWI. People of color who also identify as a sexual minority must contend with the psychological and social devaluation of their gender, racial, and sexual orientation identities by mainstream society as well as by each minority community. As a result, "when faced with a context that devalues one's

group, the person may have to engage in a process to negotiate the meaning of his or her identity” (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006, p. 1).

Theories of the identity development for sexual and racial minorities do not account for the challenges faced by individuals who identify with multiple minorities, or individuals who are both sexual and racial minorities. However, for individuals who are both racial and sexual minorities, total withdrawal from the larger White community and subsequent immersion into their racial community has been documented as difficult because of heterosexism and homophobia within their racial community (Park, 2005). Additionally, with regard to sexual identity, racial minorities may face racially based oppression by other White sexual minorities, which may prevent acceptance and integration into the gay and lesbian community (Harper, Jernewall, & Zea, 2004). Identity development theories for either racial or sexual identity development may not be wholly applicable to the unique experiences of individual who are both a racial and sexual minority.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because Black gay males and other minority students who are entering graduate programs at PWIs in increasing numbers face racial and sexual orientation microaggressions on campus and in the classroom (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The experience of oppression is damaging for those who are oppressed. Since racial and sexual orientation microaggressions have been found to be pervasive in everyday life and in academic settings (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Sue, 2010a, 2010b), it is important to help future Black gay male graduate students develop skills to recognize and address this new subtler type of racism and homophobia. This study examines not only the lived experiences of Black gay men who attend a PWI, but also the impact that this type of institution has on the multiple identities of

this particular culture of men. Furthermore, it is important to inform higher education institutions about racial and sexual orientation microaggressions. It is hoped that contributing to the growing literature on racial and sexual orientation microaggressions on college campuses will provide a starting point for furthering the understanding of microaggressions, intersectionality of multiple identities, and how institutions can create welcoming and safe environment.

For many Black men, the challenge is whether to identify as Black first or as gay first. Terms such as *Black gay*—a man who identifies as Black, and happens to be gay; and *gay Black*—a man who identifies as gay primarily have been used to describe Black gay men (Della, Wilson, & Miller, 2002). In this study, both *Black gay* and *gay Black* are used interchangeably because both identities are significant to one's being; additionally, the experience of being Black and the experience of being gay share a common bond (e.g. oppression).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The first section deals with issues facing Black men, historically and in the present. The next section concerns pertinent research and literature related to gay men and current research and perspectives. The third explores literature associated with the intersectionality of identities. This section concludes with a discussion of the impact of multiple minority identities. The fourth section provides an overview of microaggressions, as well as the potential detriment experiencing microaggressive encounters. The final section examines the issues of Black gay male graduate students. Each section reveals the lack of research about Black gay men who attend PWIs.

Black Identity

According to Granger (2011), ascertaining appropriate masculine privilege in the United States historically has not been a given expectation for the African American male. Systemic, economic, and social forces throughout American history have appeared to have the cumulative effect of keeping African American males from assuming traditional masculine roles (Granger, 2011). This progression has played an instrumental role in informing, and perhaps maintaining, the dynamics of oppression and racism that persist in the Black experience in America today. In combination with implied and perceived physical prowess and leadership ability, it is conceivable that the Black male has been, and continues to be, perceived as a significant threat to the social order and economic power structure (Granger, 2011). During the eras of slavery and in the subsequent decades, the larger American society has initiated various social and economic actions that have resulted in the subordination of the African American male and the virtual elimination of any advantage in the larger society (Sue, 2010a). The racism inherent in such

actions has operated to impede the sex role socialization of African American males and has in many instances, kept them from realizing even the most basic aspects of masculine privilege and power, namely life-sustaining employment and the ability to support a family (Granger, 2011; Walden, 2008).

As noted by Granger (2011), Sue (2010b), and Walden (2008), the historical persistence of barriers to manhood has significantly impacted the psychosocial development of African American males. The general inability to fulfill masculine roles has made rage, frustration, powerlessness, and hopelessness pervasive themes in their development dynamics. These themes are often evident in antisocial and self-destructive behavior patterns (Walden, 2008). In a society where the worth of a man (and ultimately his manhood) has seemingly been judged by his ability to accumulate a degree of wealth and power, the African American male's general inability to obtain little of either has had serious consequences for his psychosocial development.

The exploration and appreciation of the Black experience has served to nurture the socialization and psychosocial development of male youth and men, even though American society has characteristically stifled the expression of African American manhood. In essence, Black people—and Black men in particular—find themselves immersed in a culture in which they are increasingly stereotyped into negative roles that require careful navigation if a Black person is to establish a secure sense of identity outside of those stereotypes that also acknowledges how they are perceived by society at large (Walden, 2008, p. 24).

According to some scholars, the African American cultural experience has a positive relationship with optimal mental health and psychosocial development for men and male youth (Nadal, 2013; Sue, 2010b). African American male development and socialization is enhanced in a cultural environment that is characterized by fundamental African and African American-

oriented philosophical assumptions. These assumptions constitute cultural traditions among African Americans that place a premium on kinship, cooperation, mutual respect, commitment, and spirituality.

The assumptions have thus contributed to the development of positive attitudes, values, and behaviors among African Americans, often despite the social pressure of racism and oppression in the larger American society. Significantly, and from an early age, African American males are generally socialized into these cultural traditions that are the foundation of optimal African American male socialization and mental health, both in the home and larger African American community (Crawley & Freeman, 1993). These traditions inform psychosocial development and help African American males interpret the larger American social milieu. Education as well as counseling intervention with African American males; therefore, should be predicated on an appreciation of their cultural context and its crucial role in promoting psychosocial development.

Scores of African American men have developed the survival strategies, coping mechanisms, and forms of resistance to overcome societal barriers successfully, but it must be understood that systemic forces have historically been stacked against the psychosocial development of African American men. As such, Black male development is complex and challenging in a society that has historically placed the African American male at social and economic disadvantage (Crawley & Freeman, 1993).

Gay Identity

According to the American Psychological Association (2009), sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction toward others. Sexual orientation exists along a continuum that ranges from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality. Individuals with a homosexual orientation are

sometimes referred to as gay or as lesbian. Sexual orientation is different from sexual behavior because it refers to feelings and self-concept. Individuals may or may not express their sexual orientation in their behaviors.

The American Psychological Association (2009) indicated that there are numerous theories about the origins of a person's sexual orientation. Most scientists today agree that sexual orientation is most likely the result of a complex interaction of environmental, cognitive, and biological factors. In most people, sexual orientation is shaped at an early age. Although one can choose to act on his or her feelings, psychologists do not consider sexual orientation to be a conscious choice that can be voluntarily changed (APA, 2009).

While sexual identity and sexual behavior are closely related to sexual orientation, they are distinctive in that sexual identity can refer to an individual's conception of themselves while sexual behavior can refer to actual sexual acts performed by the individual. Conversely, sexual orientation can be regarded as the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted (i.e., attraction to members of one's own sex can be regarded as gay or lesbian, attraction to members of the other sex can be regarded as heterosexual, and attraction to members of both sexes can be regarded as bisexual). As previously stated, individuals may or may not express their sexual orientation in their behaviors. People who have a homosexual sexual orientation that does not align with their sexual identity are sometimes referred to as "closeted" (APA, 2009). Sexual identity may also be used to describe a person's perception of his or her own sex, rather than sexual orientation (APA, 2009).

While cultural attitudes prevent most gays and lesbians from acknowledging their sexual orientation or prevent them from behaving sexually in a way that is consistent with their

orientation, homosexual people have lived, currently live, and will continue to live in every age, culture, race, religion, gender, economic level, and profession (Lewin & Leap, 2002).

Although lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities (LGBT) are multidimensional (Nadal, 2013), research has focused on a limited number of identity-related variables.

Internalized homonegativity—the application of anti-LGBT stigma to the self—is arguably the variable that has generated the most attention among researchers (Sue, 2010c; Nadal, 2013). A few other variables have also received attention in studies, including sexual orientation concealment and perception of anti-LGBT bias in heterosexuals (Sue, 2010c). Research on these variables has provided important findings, but the focus on these variables has resulted in missed opportunities to advance knowledge by studying other facets of identity. Social identity theorists have identified a wide range of identity-related variables, such as the importance of group membership to one’s overall identity, evaluations of one’s group relative to others, and certainty about one’s group membership (Sue, 2010c). Some of these variables have been discussed with respect to LGB identity. For example, identity uncertainty has been discussed as normative in developing a marginalized sexual identity (Nadal, 2013; Sue, 2010).

Harris (1997) discussed the ever-evolving nature of gay identity. Specifically, Harris (1997) resisted idea of assimilation of gay culture into the larger mainstream society, lamenting a distinct loss of identity that was once fundamentally about being “different.” Indeed, various scholars (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Sue, 2010c) have commented on the increasing variability in personal narratives held by gay men, which are tending towards “normalcy” in an increasingly affirming society.

Intersectionality

While the extant research addressing sexual identity and sexual orientation is limited, less research has been done on the intersection of sexual orientation and racial identity (Nadal, 2013). Sullivan (2003), Sue (2010b), and Nadal (2013) stated that students of color must deal with their ethnicity as it relates to their sexual orientation. There are several authors who describe the phenomenon in their own words. Russell and Truong (2001) stated that a non-white and non-heterosexual person experiences two minority perspectives. They called it “a double minority status” (p. 113) and the condition “doubly marginalized” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 81). Russell and Truong (2001) described in more detail how gay people of color are marginalized by mainstream society not only for their racial perspective but also for their sexual orientation. Gay people of color are more directly marginalized in mainstream culture because of their double minority status (Nadal, 2013).

Loiacano (1989) studied gay identity issues among Black individuals. He looked at racism and homophobia to identify the experiences that Black gays encountered in their lives. His research focused on the environments in which Black gays lived. He explored gay identity development with Black Americans. He used responses to an open-ended questionnaire and individual interviews with the participants to gather data about the dual oppressions of the male participants and the triple (or multiple) oppressions faced by the women. The questions centered specifically on critical incidents of sexual identity awareness, the coming out process, and experience in both the Black and gay communities. He explored the impact of racism on these gay and lesbian people.

There were three themes that emerged from Loiacano’s (1989) study. The first theme was *finding validation in the gay and lesbian community*. One female participant stated that she felt more comfortable being out in the woman’s group than in the lesbian community. A male

participant also said that there were some racist perspectives in the gay community. He also stated that the gay community was predominantly formed by White gay men, so he did not feel welcomed as a gay person of color. The next theme was *finding validation in the Black community*. Several participants said that the Black community was not welcoming to gays and lesbians because the Black community consisted of heterosexual Black people, but more predominantly of heterosexual White people. One male participant described his experience in his adolescence. The community repeatedly reinforced the Black custom that family and marriage came first. He also stated that the custom oppressed his gay identity, and there was lack of support for gay persons in the Black community. Family disappointment and community expectations for individuals to be spouses and parents were specific concerns associated with the disclosure of one's sexual identity within the Black community (Boykin, 2012). The third theme was *the need to integrate identities*. The participants felt that integration was important in their lives. From the interviews, the researcher observed that the research subjects seemed to integrate their identities by being involved in the Black gay and lesbian community. One male participant described the difficulty for him to be both a gay person and an African American person. Although he integrated his two identities by being involved in the Black community, he said that the environment he was raised in had influenced him because other Black people always emphasized how non-heterosexual behavior was unacceptable. As a result, he felt that he was oppressed. One female participant said that she had two separate identities, a Black lesbian and a Black woman, but now she identified herself with one identity, a Black lesbian woman.

Earlier researchers, such as Icard (1986) and Loicano (1989), declared that Black gay men experience identity conflicts within the gay community in general, as well as within the Black community in particular. They contend with incidents of racism, stereotyping, prejudice,

and unequal treatment in the gay community that many perceive as White-dominated and unsupportive. Icard (1986) stated that many Black gay men do not receive “the kinds of positive consequences that have been defined as so important to the closure of the individual’s sexual identity... (and the gay community) reflects the values and customs of that segment of the larger White society associated with high society” (p. 90). In support of earlier research, recent studies have provided evidence to support that many Black gay men cope with heterosexism and racism by affiliating with one community more than the other (Crawford et al., 2002). That is, Black gay men might be inclined to cope with heterosexism by removing themselves from the predominantly heterosexual environment or cope with racism by removing themselves from the predominantly White communities.

Furthermore, Crawford et al. (2002) found evidence which suggested that contemporary Black gay men confront problems when socially pressured to view their identities as a singular construct or faced with placing their identities along a hierarchy. According to the Crawford et al. (2002),

Our findings suggest that to whatever degree AAGBM [African-American gay and bisexual men] are not able or allowed to simultaneously value their dual identities and be a part of both the African American and gay and lesbian subcultures, their levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem are diminished. (p. 186)

Contrastingly, Brown (2005) stated that many Black men do not want to identify at all with the label “gay.” Rather, they have created new hierarchies of labels or identities (e.g., same gender loving, or SGL; men who have sex with men, MSM) to substitute their sexual identity. Perhaps to identify as gay is to accept a label both prescribed by and subscribed to by dominant White gay society. As noted by Boykin (2012), social exclusion of Black gay men is one of the

most common forms of racism practiced by the White gay community. Similar to the projections of heterosexual media, images of Eurocentric beauty are typically projected by White gay media “that transmit messages of inferiority to Blacks and others who do not fit into the White stereotype” (Boykin, 2012, p. 89).

While every member of the Black community experiences a sense of “otherness” explicitly and implicitly in the form of racism, the gay community experiences additional instances of explicit and implicit heterosexism. According to Sue (2010b), although both forms of oppression denigrate and devalue individuals and both forms of oppression contribute to the invisibility of sexual and racial minorities within mainstream media and culture, claiming visibility and establishing otherness may have greater importance in the day-to-day fight against heterosexism than in the day-to-day fight against racism. Boykin (2012) discussed how oppression at its most basic level is the same for nearly every group, including Blacks and gays. Oppression, according to Boykin (2012), manifests in three forms:

Internal oppression as the individual struggles with his or her identity; sub-set oppression from others, who share a general group identity; and external oppression from those who dislike the group...oppression differs from group to group, so racism differs from anti-Semitism, which differs from sexism, which differs from homophobia. (p. 56)

Furthermore, while one may recognize the experiences of oppression as being the same, yet different for particular groups, there seems to be similar internal psychological consequences of oppression experienced by both Blacks and gays: “both are taught to see themselves as second-class citizens, often undeserving of society’s acceptance unless they live up to the highest standards and assimilate into the majority culture’s stereotypical view of itself” (Boykin, 2012, p. 58). Oppression by the dominant culture intends to “teach the oppressed to hate themselves but

also to hate one another, pitting minority against minority in a senseless contest to replicate the oppressor” (Boykin, 2012, p. 57). All oppressed people feel ignored and misrepresented, and Black gay men experience cultural pressure to remain silent, invisible, and closeted as gay men in the Black community, as Black men in gay society, and as both in the heterosexual, White majority culture. As stated Nadal (2013), Black gay men are often forced to cope with two distinct forms of oppression (e.g. heterosexism and racism). The struggle to balance intersecting, and often conflicting, identities is an essential for many Black gay men, and deserving of further understanding by the larger society.

Microaggressions

Sue (2010a) defined microaggressions as transient daily interactions that convey disparaging messages towards designated groups such as African Americans, homosexual, and women. Sue (2010a) labeled microaggressions as being “subtle in nature and can be manifested in the verbal, nonverbal, visual, or behavioral realm” (p. 107). Because microaggressions are often times reflexive and unconscious, the person who conveys it often times does not realize that they are conveying such message. Strikingly, microaggressions routinely typify the unconscious and the embedded biased values, beliefs, and attitudes others harbor. Ultimately, microaggressions are more likely to present themselves when that person ‘makes-believe’ not to be aware of differences, which in-turn allows that person to mitigate the importance of race, gender, or sexual orientation. The purpose of this extended literature review is to inform the scientific community and general population on the perception ethnic minorities have towards experiencing microaggressions primarily aimed at sexual orientation.

Sue (2010a) outlined and described three aspects which comprise the various forms of microaggressions: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. One classic example of a microinsult would be telling a homosexual male “I would have never guessed you were gay; you

behave like a straight guy.” The last and final form in which microaggressions can appear is microinvalidation. Microinvalidations, also often unconscious expressions, are perhaps the most devious of all other forms because they openly berate and contradict the realistic actualities of socially targeted groups (Sue, 2010a). With respect to African Americans, colorblindness is the more habitually used microinvalidation (Sue, 2010b). This particular form is of importance because it conveys a reluctance towards acknowledging ethnicity or a person’s race (Sue, 2010b). According to Constantine and Sue (2007), when internalized, microaggressions can cause shame, physical and mental distress, a reduction in goal directedness, and a feeling of only being able to attain lesser prestigious jobs. Understanding the significance and impact of microaggression is important because it provides an evidence based structure for understanding and categorizing modern forms of racism.

Research on microaggressions and subtle forms of prejudice pose three major psychological dilemmas: (1) damaging effects caused by the friction between the dominant and socially undervalued group realities, (2) the apparent invisibility of both intentional and unintentional bias, and (3) the deceptive downplay of perceived harm by microaggression. First, research has revealed that group-specific experiences mold and bias their perception of reality (Sue, 2010c). For example, Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) stated that many White individuals seem to be under the impression that racism is no longer a major problem. Contrastingly, many Black individuals have continued to report constant and continuing moments of prejudice and racism. Empowered groups define the reality of not only themselves, but of others through mass media, social institutions, and education (Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008). When individuals are taught, by family, friends, peers, school, or mass media, that people of color or homosexuals are deviant, a hierarchy of power and privilege thus becomes customary and

perpetuated (Sue, 2010c). Within the system, access to opportunities, power, and prestige is available to the select few at the top. This system produces internal and external conflict with those who are less-empowered. Second, cultural conditioning and socialization has been shown to spur subtle prejudices and typecasts about various ethnic minority groups, resulting in what some would call ‘culturally inherited biases.’ This predispose inclination towards certain biases also contributes the prior psychological dilemma of conflicting realities. Third, and of particular significance for this study, is the perceived harm by microaggressions.

Sue (2010a) described microaggressive stress as “race-related, gender-related, or sexual-orientation-related events or situations that are experienced as a perceived threat to one’s biological, cognitive, emotional, psychological, and social well-being, or position in life” (p. 96). Microaggressive stress has been shown to produce biological/physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral effects. However, the exact severity and effect of microaggressive stressors can vary “depending on the nature of the challenge posed by the threat and the perceived available resources of the person” (Sue, 2010a, p. 97).

Biologically, victims of microaggressions experienced increased levels of stress and amplified susceptibility toward developing new illnesses. While chronic microaggressive stress is a reality for people of color, women, and the LGBT community, Sue (2010a) stated, “Marginalized groups must deal with monocultural standards that equate differences with deficiency or evidence; forced compliance to contradictory cultural role expectations; and pervasive and chronic prejudice and discrimination [that] have a significant impact upon health” (p. 97). For example, individuals who identify as LGBT and experienced greater levels of indirect microaggressions in the form of assumed heterosexuality reported more health-related concerns (Sue, 2010c). Similarly, Sue (2010c) referenced a study which looked at the impact of

subtle racism on African American men. The study provided evidence to support a correlation between increased in blood pressure, heart rate, and symptoms akin to hypertension with the experience microaggressions. While microaggressive experiences themselves might not cause an illness or infection, they have been shown to decrease the immune system efficiency, thus increasing susceptibility to illness and diseases (Sue, 2010c).

From an emotional stance, microaggressive stressors deter emotional stability, and thwart psychological adjustment, self-esteem, subjective sense of well-being, and overall mental health (Sue, 2010a). Furthermore, Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder (2008) presented evidence which suggested that microaggressive stressors can be associated with the manifestation of certain mental disorder, examples range from general anxiety to feeling completely isolated. Depression symptoms have also been implicated with gender-role confusion, subtle sexism, and lower sense of autonomy or self-control. Furthermore, there were four characteristics of stressors that were particularly salient in eliciting depressive symptoms (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). Sue (2010a) stated,

The disorder is more likely to occur when stressors (1) are severe in nature (*severity*), (2) are chronic rather than acute (*chronicity*), (3) where the onset is early (*onset*), and (4) when they involve loss of humiliation as opposed to dangerous events or threat (*type of stressor*). (p. 99)

As such, microaggressive experiences fit the prior mentioned criteria in that they are cumulative and continuous, often begin at birth, and besets an individual's integrity while eliciting humiliation.

Microaggressions effect cognition and behavior in a myriad of ways. Cognitive conflicts as a result of microaggressions are classified under three processes: (1) efforts to make sense of

the incident, (2) disheveled cognitive processes, and (3) label risk (Sue, 2010a). Initially, when a person encounters a microaggression, they exert additional mental resources in an attempt to make sense of the situation. By trying to grapple with the situation, the person experiencing the microaggression loses focus on the task at hand. Unfortunately, if the person is at work or school their productivity or performance may be compromised. Finally, a receiver of the aggression might experience lower cognitive functioning due to fear possibly being labeled. Sue (2010b) outlined several behavioral affects which microaggression may elicit. The receiver might grow suspicious towards the majority, feel a sense of forced submission, experience anger towards the majority, and grapple with feelings of hopelessness. Targeted individuals often experience cognitive dissonance and attacks on their self-esteem.

Behaviorally, a person often develops a survival instinct to better navigate hostile and disparaging microaggressions directed towards their identifying group. According to Sue (2010a), the variations in response to microaggressive experiences can range tremendously depending on a number of factors. For example, “Some of the coping responses seem functional and adaptive (taking care of the self and educating the perpetrator), while others may prove dysfunctional and maladaptive (becoming depressed, overconsumption of alcohol, engaging in risky sexual behavior, striking back in anger)” (Sue, 2010, p. 103). Similarly, researchers have highlighted several other observable behavioral reactions, such as (1) hypervigilance and skepticism, (2) forced compliance, (3) rage and anger, (4) fatigue and hopelessness, and (5) strength through adversity.

Higher Education

The number of minorities in higher education has increased over time in the United States. According to Weaver-Hightower (2003), there were 4,321,400 people of color in higher

education in 2000, almost double the 2,704,600 reported in 1990. Also, the percentage of people of color in higher education in 1990 was 22.41%, and 31.67% in 2002. This shows that more and more people of color participate in higher education each year. The data regarding the number of Black gay students was not available from any agencies, neither the government nor PWIs.

Evans and Wall (1991) examined how PWIs are environments in which negative attitudes and discrimination against Black gay men and lesbians pervade both overtly and covertly in classrooms, residence halls, offices, student groups, and institutional policies. However, there exists limited research that examines the lived experiences of this population at such institutions of higher learning.

While all students must create their own way and navigate the graduate school environment, Nadal (2013) noted that gay students must also test their school environments for specific issues in regard to their sexual identity, including the level of homophobia and heterosexism. Gay students must assess how they will fit into the environment, given the norms of the culture and its community members. The environment can play a key role in the gay student deciding whether or not to disclose his gay identity on campus.

According to Harper and Hurtado (2007), institutional environments are influenced by (a) government policies, (b) campus's historical legacy of racial exclusion, (c) numerical representation of African American male students and faculty, and (d) racial behaviors inside and outside the classroom. In light of this assertion, it is imperative that we explore how campus environments can create isolation, dissatisfaction, and academic complacency for Black gay male students. Microaggressions can occur in any setting, such as in classrooms and educational materials; however, the most damaging ones are likely to occur between those with power and those who are disempowered (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2008; Sue,

Capodilupo, Nadal, et al., 2008). As classrooms become increasingly diverse, the occurrences of microaggressions increase as well, and unfortunately, many instructors are ill equipped to deal with students' reactions. It has been hypothesized that racial microaggressions often trigger difficult dialogues on race in the classroom because they are found to be offensive to students of color who directly or indirectly confront perpetrators who prefer to avoid the topic or feel falsely accused of racism (Sue & Constantine, 2007). As a result, the dialogues or interactions become emotionally charged, producing misunderstandings, conflicts, and hostility between parties (Watt, 2007). Unfortunately, teachers "do not recognize racial microaggressions when they occur, feel uncomfortable with race-related topics, and lack the skills needed to facilitate difficult dialogues on race" (Sue et al., 2008, p. 183).

Studies reveal that microaggressions in the classroom create a hostile and invalidating environment (Solórzano Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), and can lead to stereotype threat—being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group (Steele & Aronson, 1995), as well as lower productivity. Often, the contributions of people of color are neglected in curriculums; as a result, White students are affirmed and Black students "feel their identities are constantly assailed in the classroom. Black students are likely to expend considerable emotional energy protecting their own integrity while at the same time being distracted from fully engaging in the learning process" (Sue, 2010, p. 10). Another example of a microaggressive occurrence is evidenced when White faculty characterize Black communication as abnormal by indicating that Black students are becoming too emotional (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Sue, 2010b). The invisibility of microaggressions can create confusion and disillusionment because the intent is not always discernible (Sue et al., 2008). Furthermore, it produces "psychological dilemmas that unless adequately resolved can lead to increased levels of racial anger, mistrust, and loss of self-

esteem for persons of color” (Sue, 2010b, p. 30). Due to the covert and unconscious nature of microaggressions, they are often dismissed by the perpetrator as being insignificant; however, for Black gays, the cumulative nature of these seemingly insignificant acts can have deleterious effects and create feelings of marginalization (Nadal, 2013; Sue, 2008, 2010a).

Current literature is saturated with the experiences of African American males in education (Jackson & Moore, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008). Further, research also showed that microaggressions affect the experiences and outcomes for African American males differently than other groups (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Sue, 2010b; Walpole, 2007). However, the research which seeks to address the unique implication of those who identify with multiple minority status is scarce at best (Nadal, 2013; Sue, 2010a; Sue, 2008). As such, Black gay male graduate students at PWIs continue to remain under studied and overlooked within the larger body of scientific research and practice.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Method

Chapter Overview

A phenomenological research design was chosen for this study. According to Creswell (2012), “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). As such, the study aimed to obtain the perspectives of participants and to report their perceptions from the vantage points of their own words, ideology, and constructs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In the words of Creswell (2012), a phenomenological study can “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 76). As part of the phenomenological process, a semi-structured interview was created to elicit the essence of meaning of the participants’ experiences. The purpose of this study was to give a voice to Black gay male graduate students who by virtue of their sexual orientation and perceived racial origin are viewed, and thereby perhaps view themselves, in ways that do not align with their own values or beliefs system. This study examined Black gay male graduate students at PWIs in the Chicago Metropolitan area.

Participants

To acquire an adequate sample, the investigator relied upon convenience sampling for several reasons. First, this form of recruitment was deemed most applicable given the scarcity of LGBT-affinity and Black/Race-related student groups and organizations. Second, convenience sampling allowed for the selection of participants who were accessible, within a given proximity, and meet the necessary criteria. Third, this form of sampling allowed for the selection of participants who met a predetermined criteria specific to this study. Participants who qualified for the study were individuals 18 years of age or older who self-identified as (1) cisgender male, (2) African American or Black, and (3) gay/queer/homosexual. Also, selected participants were enrolled in a graduate level program, and had completed at least one term or semester of a

graduate level of education. Participants were recruited through student campus groups, such as Black and/or LGBT affinity groups, or school affiliated faculty members. A total of four graduate students were selected to participate in the study. According to Creswell (2012), the identified group of a phenomenological inquiry may vary from “3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15” (p. 78). In terms of their primary social communities, all social groups will be accepted (e.g. African American LGBT community, heterosexual, non-heterosexual, same gender- loving student groups, White heterosexual community, or White LGBT community). Participation was voluntary, and participants were not compensated.

For participants who consented to participating in the study, the researcher asked for demographic information such as age, race, sexual orientation, geographic location, time enrolled at current PWI, campus group affiliation(s), and prior educational history. Demographic information, which is relevant to being eligible to participate in the present study, was a requirement to complete before moving on to the next page while the remaining questions were optional.

Sampling Method and Interview Format

All interviews were conducted individually by the researcher. They were conducted at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology due to ease of access via public transportation and privacy. Each participant completed one 40- to 50-minute interview. The finalized findings were made available for the participants via the researcher’s website at www.jerroldhandyresearch.com. Interviews consisted of semistructured questions (see Appendix A), and were recorded for subsequent transcription. Interviews were audio recorded on a handheld digital recorder while the interviewer simultaneously took notes; notes were shredded upon completion of the interview. Audio recordings were transcribed and verified to ensure

transcripts accuracy. All data was securely stored and saved in a password protected folder on the researcher's computer, wherein only the researcher has access. Participants were also assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

During the interview, participants were asked to define their racial and sexual identities, as well as discuss their perceptions of the impact of their identities on their experiences at a PWI (see Appendix A for complete list of questions). The participants were asked to respond to queries about the environments on campus in which they felt the safest, and they were asked to answer questions pertaining to their experiences associating with other African American and non-heterosexual students on campus. In qualitative research, the interviewer is an essential instrument in the data collection process. As such, the interviewer noted participants' affective and emotional reactions.

Data Collection and Analysis

Using an open coding process, the primary investigator approached the transcripts in an inductive manner. While the researcher did approach the process with preconceived constructs, measures were taken to ensure authenticity of the data and to ensure that the researcher allowed the data to speak for itself (discussion to follow). Rather, the researcher used constant-comparison among and within the transcripts and identified reoccurring words, ideas, and concepts (Creswell, 2012). More specifically, the thematic analysis method termed *meaning condensation* was utilized to examine respondents' transcripts. Meaning condensation entailed reducing the large interview transcripts into more concise statements that paraphrase respondents' main ideas (Goode-Cross, 2009). This method involved five steps and was especially useful with phenomenological data.

The first step required the investigator to carefully review each transcript to get a sense of the overall experience of each respondent, then reread the transcript breaking texts down into “natural meaning units.” The researcher then distilled the natural units into concise codes. During the next step, the derived codes for each transcript were recorded. The researcher adhered to the principle of horizontality during the data analysis process during which no meaning was considered more important than any other. Thus, each code was given equal weight. During the next stage, the investigator categorized the collected codes into themes. The researcher then linked together the essential, non-repetitive themes into a descriptive statement of the experience of being a Black gay graduate student at a PWI. Additionally, three colleagues reviewed the transcripts and themes as independent reviewers of the data. The prior mentioned step of having three colleagues review the data was undertaken due to the investigator’s closeness to the subject pool and data. Furthermore, this additional step aligned with a phenomenological methodology and bolstered the study’s credibility and reliability.

In addition to being sensitive to the needs of this marginalized population, the investigator sought to understand what cultural, religious, or other differences must be respected. In collecting data, the researcher did not simply “use” participants by gathering data and leaving without giving back. The researcher did, however, build trust and convey a sense of anticipated distribution of the outcome of the study; in the end, the researcher provided copies of the report to participants via the researcher’s website.

Validity and Reliability

Validity, also regarded as credibility and transferability, is defined by Finlay (2006) as “the degree to which research truly measures what it was meant to measure... This criterion rests upon the assumption that the phenomenon being investigated possesses ‘reality’ in an

undisputed, objective sense” (pp. 4-5). Credibility and transferability were enhanced in several ways. First, the researcher triangulated different data sources of information. The investigator compared current literature about the topic with participants’ narratives in order to “build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2012, p. 191). Second, the researcher utilized rich, thick data description to convey the findings. According to Creswell (2012), using thick data description “may give the discussion an element of shared experiences” (p. 191), thereby adding to the validity of the findings. Third, the researcher clarified the biases he brought to the study (see section titled Researcher Dynamics in Results). As a Black gay male graduate student, the researcher recognized the possibility that his experiences might affect the reporting and analysis of the study’s findings. To account for this potential bias, the investigator engaged in several reflective dialogues with a faculty member and three colleagues, who were unfamiliar with the nature of the study. Fourth, the researcher employed external audits, via three colleagues, in order to examine and review both the process and the product of the study.

Reliability, or dependability, is often defined as “the consistency of the means of data collection” (Finlay, 2006, p. 4). Although reliability is considered to be largely irrelevant in the case of qualitative research, in part due to eliciting responses of a participant or researcher at a specific time and place and in a specific interpersonal context, it was enhanced in several ways. First, the researcher utilized external examination by three colleagues to ensure accurate documentation of data, methods, and decisions. Second, the researcher employed triangulation as a mean of receiving varying opinions and insight for researcher who may or may not be familiar with the subject area. Triangulation is denoted by the use of multiple data sources in an investigation of a phenomenon. Last, the investigator used intercoder agreement. Intercoder agreement is the widely used term to denote the extent to which independent coders analyze data

and reach the same conclusion. According to Creswell (2012), intercoder agreement entails “the use of multiple coders to analyze transcripts data” (p. 253).

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory study is to introduce the ways that cisgender Black gay male graduate students navigate their identities, providing grounding for future research, clinicians and institutions alike. A brief profile of each participant is presented here and is followed by an examination of the themes identified through data analysis.

The interviews were designed to let the participants share their experiences for use in a qualitative study. The words used in the descriptions and in the quotes are the language of the participants themselves. The words in a qualitative study are the most important elements (Creswell, 2012), and they provide clues to identities held by the participants. Participant profiles also provide a context in which to understand the words. A total of four cisgender men who identified as gay and Black (or African American) were interviewed for this study. The semi-structured interviews lasted from 40- to 50-minutes, and utilized a questionnaire that was adapted from prior research studies. The questions addressed how participants (1) saw themselves within a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), (2) interacted with peers, staff, and faculty, and (3) navigated identifying with multiple identities.

The pseudonym used in the individual profiles and throughout the remainder of this study were selected by the primary investigator to protect identity and privacy. Some biographical information is presented, in aggregate form, to provide a sense of the diversity of the participants while ensuring anonymity. The participants ranged in age from 27 to 41, and all had at least a college education and at the time of the study were enrolled in a graduate program at a PWI for at least one term or semester. All participants reported attending similar graduate programs, such as Clinical Psychology, Community Psychology, Counseling Psychology, or Education. Participants reported having held positions as graduate and faculty assistants, school

administrative liaison, and staff and faculty members. Although all participants reported being openly gay prior to beginning their respective programs, they each noted varying degrees of being openly gay while attending their current PWI.

Jasen

Jasen was 27 years old, having graduated with Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in psychology-related areas. He noted that all of the schools he attended were identified as PWIs. When asked about his decision(s) to pursue additional education at a PWI, Jasen stated, "At the time I believed in the school's mission, but I did not know that the school itself didn't." Jasen identified himself as middle class, cisgender male, gay, and as racially/ethnically Black. When asked about his identity Jasen replied, "I think my identities vary in salience depending on my surroundings." He later explained that one or more of his identities may become more or less dominant depending on the context (i.e., "While I'm on campus I often don't show my gay side as much just because of the various reactions from others").

Clayton

Clayton was 41 years old with a graduate degree in Fine Arts. Clayton noted that he was enrolled in a Doctorate of Education program. In addition to being a student, Clayton shared that he was a fulltime faculty member at the same institution. He remarked that his decision to attend a PWI was based largely on finances and affordability. Clayton identified himself as middle class, cisgender male, gay, and as racially/ethnically Black. Clayton also noted that other salient identities were "husband," "faculty member," and "artist."

Destin

Destin was 31 years old and identified himself as middle class, cisgender male, "technically bisexual but functionally really gay," and as racially/ethnically Black. He reported being born and raised in the Midwestern part of the USA, but completed his undergraduate

degree at University in the Eastern part of the USA. Destin highlighted this information because it helped him to learn to lead with being “Black gay male.” For Destin, the decision to attend his current institution stemmed directly from his area of professional interest and the desire to work with faculty members with similar research interests.

Marcel

Marcel was 34 years old, having graduated with a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in the field of psychology. He indicated that his current institution was his first experience with being in a predominantly White environment. When asked about his decision(s) to attend a PWI, Marcel stated, “It was the only school I applied to I have to be honest with you.” He later explained that he initially believed that the school’s mission aligned with his own personal and professional aspirations.

Themes Across Participants

Nine major themes, as well as five minor themes, emerged when examining the interviews of the four participants. Major themes are defined as those that were addressed by all participants, and minor themes are defined at topics addressed by at least two participants. There was variability within each major theme in the uniqueness of each participant’s life experience which is reflected by the varying number quote per theme.

Major Theme One: Microaggressive Experiences

There was a wide array of experiences amongst the participants regarding experiences with various forms of microaggressions, such as microassault (e.g., obvious attack, sometimes verbal, nonverbal, or environmental, with the intentions of projecting biased and prejudiced attitudes), microinsult (e.g., verbal/nonverbal or environmental indications that projects offensiveness, insensitivity, and insults towards a targeted person’s racial, sexual orientation, or

gender identity), and microinvalidation (e.g., unconscious expressions that openly berate and/or contradict the realistic actualities of socially targeted groups).

All participants remarked about experiencing varying degrees of inflexibility when they attempted to introduce new ways to think about race, sexuality, or the experiences of someone who is multi-marginalized, and as such these instances were coded as example of microinvalidations.

We were something they didn't want to talk about, they didn't want to address. I think it was the idea that if you were out you were being somehow self-indulgent or you were trying to deflect from your real art...I felt like I was being met with the message "Stop writing about being gay, stop writing about sex, let's teach the real stuff." And everybody seemed to just along, it's the craziest class. (M)

I've had the experience of White-thought as superior to that of color across many aspects of the graduate school experience. I've had to provide further evidence of the validity of minority perspectives than those coming from White authors. (J)

I have never felt micro aggression in terms of race or homophobia I have to say but I do think with some of the administrative people not the people who teach but the administrators the people who want to be superintendents. I do think they have a world view that they think that their way is the only way. (C)

Yeah, there's a notion that minorities wanna study minorities and that's a problem, 'cause it's too close to home. But there's often praise offered to people in the majority when they study minorities. They're seen as being caring, being interested, being invested, being good people for doing work that's distant from them, and it's an assumption that my work should be about straight White folks, and I'm not sure why that is. So I often have to

contend with a notion that my work is sort of easier because it's proximal to me, when in fact there's actually a lot of emotional difficulty in doing work close to you, and sort of having to maintain a distance from it is quite challenging. (D)

A person who was high up in administration made a comment like, "I'm a gay male so I understand your struggle." I'm like, "I don't think you do." So because of his position I wanted to check him but I had to like say something like, "Maybe you might want to rethink saying that." (M)

Another significant occurrence related to experiences of microassaults, or subtle verbal slights, from White peers, staff, and faculty. Although each participant expressed unique experiences with verbal and over slights, they were nevertheless perceived to be demeaning and detrimental to the participants' overall wellbeing. For example, Destin recalled an exchange wherein a White peer questioned his "gayness." In response Destin rebounded by asking, "Am I really a different sort of gay than what you're expecting? If so let's discuss this now."

Jasen and Destin both recalled verbal statements that were directed at them because they were Black gay man who possessed characteristics that differed from the perceived norm of some of their peers. The microaggressive encounters subsequently elicited distance and at times contention between the interviewees and those expecting a different presentation.

I'm larger in physicality, academically focused, and less effeminate than perhaps others had previously experienced, and therefore I have to endure constant critique from others? (D)

When I first started my program you won't believe how many people were shocked to learn that I was gay because "I didn't look or act the part." Honestly, it felt more like

people were just projecting their stuff onto me...I mean people would assume that I was straight because of my build and the way I dressed (laughs). (J)

Another overt microaggressive experience indicated by all participants related to challenging issues of power and privilege, while advocating for more balanced perspectives.

Participants reported being on the receiving end of remarks such as:

You make a valid point...you are Black after all. (D)

He's just an angry queer Black guy getting angry again. (C)

I think that sometimes your arguments are more opinions rather than supported fact...maybe you're too close to the data. (J)

Oh I don't want to go to the south side because I don't want to die...wait you're not from the south side right? (M)

I am right, you are not like other Black guys because you've made it this far. (D)

Some participants reported more detailed verbal microaggressive interaction with others, such as:

I was talking to someone recently [at] my [training site], and they asked about interpersonal violence or sort of domestic violence in gay relationships, and they were saying, "Well, given the gender role there, it's probably the same as heterosexual relationships, right?" And I said, "Given what, what gender role are you referring to?" And they're like, "Well, someone who would be more effeminate, more than someone who is masculine, would be the one victimized."

(D)

With faculty I remember with one faculty member he made a comment - of course I'm the only Black man in the room as usual. And he's like, "Be mindful when

you're testing people in LSE communities especially African Americans they'll have lower IQs” and kind of looked at me. And I was kind of like - I was like, "Oh okay this is happening right now." I looked around and like no one picked that up. I'm like, "No one picked that up? No one saw that?" I'm like, "Okay this is what the school is about." (M)

I walked up on campus and someone said - this person just came from like [field experience] and they were testing on the south side." And they were like, "Why is it that Black men, Black culture, Black men want to impregnate every woman they see?" (M)

When I applied for my [school job] someone was like, "You knew you were going to get it...you're Black and gay." (M)

In shifting to non-verbal experiences of microaggression, or microinsults, all participants again recalled numerous, yet varying degrees, of non-verbal slights from White peers, staff, faculty, and school administration.

It took me a minute to get it, but [other students and faculty] were locking their doors when I walked past them on campus. (D)

Some of the undergraduates would hold their purses or bags tighter when I walked by. (D)

Like I mentioned the Provost. I tried to shake his hand and congratulate him. He wouldn't even look at me. I'm like, "What the?" I'm like, "I am so glad you're leaving because I don't know what the deal is with you. Do you not like Black folks? Do you not like gay folks? Do you not like me? What is it?" (C)

You get looks like, "Oh there's a Black guy here." Because there's not that many Blacks - I'm the only Black guy in my cohort. So there's not a lot of people that look like me. Not

many Black men walking around so was kind of like okay. So you get the stares and looks and it's a different space for me so it's like I don't know how to navigate this because it's new for me. (M)

In addressing microaggressive experiences in a broader frame, all participants shared examples wherein the actions of persons of color, often their own, were perceived differently than of a White peer. Jasen stated, "For them, speaking up was seen as assertiveness and it was well received, but for me it was regarded as aggressive."

I think in all situations my encounters with White people in the institution as a student and an instructor and now and administrator I think they're all afraid of me like exploding...some even admitted that they were kind of afraid [of] being the room with me at that moment because they didn't know what I was going to do. Like, "Do you think I was going to get violent or rough with you or something?" (C)

I don't know if that was like a bad day for me or what, but I decided to challenge this person...then the guy and other people were like, "Why are you upset, just calm down." I wasn't even angry. So I said, "Just because you feel uncomfortable doesn't mean this conversation doesn't need to be had." And I said, "Why is it okay for me to feel uncomfortable with [my peers'] comments but when I challenge it and you feel uncomfortable that's not acceptable." (M)

The White peers around me would often become hyperaware of their own reactions to me...it led to an interesting interplay wherein the people around me - like you could tell when they were struggling in decide if they can or can't allow themselves to have negative reactions towards me." (J).

Major Theme Two: Isolation

There was a wide array of experiences amongst the participants regarding experiences with various forms of isolations, from feeling isolated from oneself to feeling isolated from others. All participants remarked about experiencing these feelings in varying degrees of intensity and salience. Overall participants seemed to feel isolated in many aspects of their graduate school experience. For example, as Jasen experienced overlapping minority statuses and very purposefully constructed his self-presentation, he reported several significant negative interactions with others peers, staff, and faculty who expected a different presentation of his identity. As a result, Jasen remarked,

I just learned to keep to myself and avoid all of it...it's sad because we are in the mental health field and I should be able to share this information, but I actually feel better just keeping to myself instead of having to constantly explain myself.” (J)

Other participants shared statements such as:

I think we as Black gay men in higher [education] we're often in situations where we're either the only Black person, or you're the only man. I cannot tell you how many times it's been me in a room full of White women...I feel like I'm at the mercy of a whole bunch of White women and it's an isolating experience. (C)

I'm trying to defy stereotypes and it gets to the point where you do get self-conscious about a lot of things and it shouldn't matter at all and it doesn't matter at all. So I just anymore - I say to them, "You look sad or you look angry." People always say that about Black men, either I look sad or I look angry. Why can't I just be - will you all just leave me alone. That's why I just try to be alone a lot. (C)

One of them - wait am I the only gay African American right now? I'm probably the only one in my - oh gosh I am the only one in the program. Wow. I think - I'm sorry but it's just now hitting me. (M)

So I think people - I don't know I think people do see me it's just that that's not what they speak about and that's not what they interpret. And maybe it's my own stuff. I don't think they see all of me. I think it's very rare. (M)

Sometimes I'll say something like, "Oh that's shade." And someone will be like, "What's shade? Is it a tree outside?" And that makes me just stop talking and keep to myself. (M)

Major Theme Three: Conflicting Interactions with School Administration

While salient for all participants, this theme also brought into focus academia as a whole and the variety of interactions across different programs, school, and disciplines. Three participants elaborated about a disconnect between the school's desire to retain the students of color, because of their multi-minority statuses, and the lack of specific services to help this population pursue their academic goals. For example, Destin described experiencing a loss of mentors, an inability to retain other students within an ethnic and sexual minority, and a lack of competence in communicating with student who identify with multiple minority statuses. As a result, Destin indicated that he resolved to seek out his own supportive services and other individuals who were like-minded. Other examples by participants were: Issues with the faculty and their perceived unpreparedness when discussing issues of diversity; faculty member calling the interviewee by the name of other students, staff, and faculty members of color, followed by perceived indifference regarding the matter; lack of social and emotional support at the institution which led two participants to return home and spend time with family in order to feel supported; Growing awareness of a PWI as more taxing than beneficial (e.g. "...I think that the

benefits that sort of are derived are about how I can serve my own needs, so it's less so about how I can be served by being here"); and a constant awareness of the gaps in diversity responsiveness among the faculty, students and administration.

Jasen and Marcel described feeling that the school was using them as an indication of their commitment to diversity, yet they were unavailable to assist him with financial or social support or guidance.

"Oh we're doing this great campaign for advertisement why don't you come and take a picture? ...I feel like an object sometimes. I think sometimes I feel like I'm being used to be the face of diversity for the school and the program. And I think - yeah that's how I feel. Like I'm an object sometimes. And I feel like - it's only been brought up once like, "Why is [Marcel] always being asked to do these things?" It's hard to figure out when people actually are authentically genuinely interested in me or viewing me as an object. And I think it's related to my [school job] so they can say like, "We had these two Black students working for us." But once again I think if I wasn't in my position it would be different. I don't think I'd be used as much. (M)

Related to interaction with school administration, three participants specifically referenced a disconnect between those at the administrative level, the faculty, and students of the PWI. In the words of Jasen, "The administration was behind the times and stuck in their ways when dealing with diversity...there were professors who advocated for change, but the school just seemed set in perpetuating outdated ideals." Similarly, other participants remarked:

The way the power, the hierarchy, is structured at that school, all the power is concentrated with not even White folks, but with White women. And it's been interesting over these nine years to watch...it's both welcoming and distancing. (C)

I was talking to the people who have influence of the faculty curriculum. I said, "Faculty aren't trained in having these difficult discussions." I said, "I think we talk about how we want to get students to walk out of here and be socially responsible and blah, blah." I said, "Well how can they be socially responsible when they're not being challenged and the professors aren't even equipped to have these conversations. (M)

My friend M who is African American, she and I and Pedro, we were the people of color in the room and we were saying [these courses] really weren't for us. Everything I'm learning in this class I live every day and there are White women who are saying, "I didn't know there was an ethnic section in Walgreens for Latina and Black women. I didn't know." And all this stuff. And they were so fascinated by the recognition of their own privilege yet shocked to think that their husbands might be fantasizing about Black trans* women when they're having sex with them, that type of thing. (C)

I can still remember the first [time] it happened when – like when we broached the subject of race and it got quiet in the room. I was typing away then stopped and looked up and everyone seemed to be passively looking at me. I thought to myself, "Ok so the teacher and students aren't ready, or equipped, to tackle this"...so I stepped up to the plate. Honestly, it still happens it – it has happened in almost every course...every course. It got to the point that I would apologize to the class beforehand because I knew I would be called upon to talk about the harder issues. (J)

Major Theme Four: Impacts of Mentors and Role Models

Although the presence of mentors and role models varied among participants, each interviewee referenced the importance of the presence, or lack thereof, of someone who

empathized with their lived experiences. However, all participants were not in agreement regarding the valence of the presence of a mentor or role model. For example, Destin noticed a difference in treatment between himself and other mentees. While the mentor had a long history furthering research in the Black gay male community, it seemed that the mentor was accustomed to a certain level of gratitude from his mentees of that population. Because Destin had worked very hard to get to his position, he felt that providing adulation was unnecessary as he had earned his place. In not receiving the gratitude he had come to expect, the mentor reportedly began to treat the interviewee in a more negative way than those who paid him overt deference. As such, Destin resolved to describe his relationship with his mentor as “friendly but adversarial.”

Jasen elaborated on the topic and described reaching out to several faculty members, including faculty members of color, but was not able to secure a mentor. The interviewee elaborated on the means by which he attempted to connect and secure a mentor (e.g., attending special lecture and presentations and volunteering to help with non-school related projects and research studies). The interviewee also recalled being invited to a meeting by a faculty member who wanted to “warn” the interviewee about trusting other faculty members. This faculty member used the term “leeches” and warned the interviewee that others viewed him as a “golden trophy” because of his multiple minority statuses. Other participants shared dissimilar experiences such as:

There was a gay Black male on the faculty that was there for like a year. And I was like - I would go in his office and chill and we'd talk and laugh and once he left and I was kind of like I lost my – it was kind of like my safe space where all of my identities were acknowledged and affirmed. (M)

I had a supervisor who really - I think she realized - she was the only person who really realized that I'm the only Black person in my space. And she was like, "What's that like?" And I was like, "Oh okay. This hasn't been asked of me before." And then she was like, "Who are you outside of this? Who are you outside?" And she was really interested in who I was. She asked, "Who you are out here. I can see parts of you but I don't see all of you." And she said, "I wonder what it would be like for you to really be who you are?" And I was like, "Hmm." (M)

Regarding role models, Clayton spoke directly about the subject matter and the impact on his own identity. He stated:

I want my dissertation to be published. I want people to get something from it. I tell myself, "You've got to let people read it because you're going to reach that kid on campus who thinks he's the only one." They need to see that yeah, you are more than just the guy who checks their grammar and the APA...they'll get a different perspective of what's like to be Black and gay. (C)

Major Theme Five: Distinctive Interactions with Peers, Staff, and Faculty of Color

There was a wide array of experiences amongst the participants regarding interactions with peers, staff, and faculty members. A noteworthy point that one participant related to the possible perception of Black peers viewing his work with his White mentors as perpetuating the stereotype of "White superior male figure helping the poor Black student." For Destin, this perspective, he believed, was based on the idea that if multi-marginalized people were truly committed to furthering the community, they would have chosen a Black mentor with whom to work. In speaking further on his interaction with peers, staff, and faculty of color, Destin stated:

There really hasn't been a particular space necessarily, other than maybe catching somebody in the hallway and being there for 45 minutes talking and slowly sort of other Black folks joining onto the conversation, and so we have a critical mass and then go get dinner because there's now seven of us in the hallway having a chat and wanting to connect more. (D)

All participants also noted varying degrees of positive and negative experiences with peers, staff, and faculty members of color. Jasen and Destin noted an initial level of “planned” or “purposeful” distance from peers of color out of fear of being labeled as “one of them” or fear of confirming the biases of others. However, both participants noted that they later grew to value and appreciate the connection they had with people of color because of similar experiences with microaggressions, social isolation, and compounding life factors (e.g. having to worry about generating income while enrolled in a program fulltime). Evidence of similar experiences were referenced by other participants, such as:

I'm lucky in that in my cohort there are three other African American men. They're all straight but have been kind of standoffish to me, but at least know there are other...I think because there are so few minority people in higher [education], especially faculty, I think there's a feeling like we got to stick together. But when I see them I always say “Hello” and they just don't acknowledge me. I don't know what's that's about – I don't know if they know I'm gay or if I'm some big old lefty liberal. (C)

I have a sense of safety with people of color I will say that. (M)

I think actually I talk more to [peers of color] than to gay students and I think because like - it's interesting though. I think the multi-racial students they're like - they can sometimes pick and choose which side they want to be on. Sometimes they're like, "Oh

I'm just going to identify with my Whiteness right now." And I'm like, "You can do that, you have that opportunity." I'm like, "Okay I'm glad you can make that transition." But I think I feel closer to them. I talk more to them. I hang out with them. Actually I hang out with them outside of school. I don't hang out with the White kids outside of school as I think about it. (M)

I noticed that the higher ups never spoke to me when they walked by, this was before the faculty and staff had this conversation about race or something. They were - I would speak to them, they would never speak to me. After that race conversation, "Hey, how are you?" I'm like, "Oh wow. Welcome to my face and welcome to my presence." Like now you care about me and now you're talking to me. Even though I've been sitting here for years. (M).

Major Theme Six: Unpredictable Interactions with White Peers, Staff, and Faculty

There was a wide array of experiences amongst the participants regarding interactions with White peers, staff, and faculty members. For instance, Jasen and Destin shared that they felt as though their White peers were constantly looking for permission from them, such as needing permission to make certain remarks while in their presence or other persons of color, needing permission to state their opinions on matters of diversity, or needing acknowledgement to disagree with the interviewee. Destin, for example, stated that he felt as if he was "acting as a barometer of political correctness for White peers." On some level he felt as if he was "being looked to as a reference to whether or not a White/heterosexual person's opinions regarding homosexuality or race were acceptable."

In further explaining their interactions with White peers, staff, and faculty members, all participants referenced some semblance of a perceived imbalanced of power (i.e., being gay vs.

Black vs. graduate student vs. male vs. a combination thereof). Of note, all participants noted that this dynamic seemed most prominent when interacting with White peers, staff, and faculty members. Statements reflecting the participants' experiences were:

I've had experiences where they're very resistant to me, to hearing what I have to say because most of them are White women and you have this big Black guy trying to tell them what to do. (C)

I have all these White women putting fingers in my face and maybe thinking they can get one over on me because I'm gay - and thinking that well because he's a Black man we have to keep him on a leash because you never know when he might explode or do something or say something to a student. So yeah I think that's my biggest challenge, fighting for space and fighting for respect and recognition. (C)

I will say that a critical consciousness around intersectionality led to some difficulties with my advisor. He's a gay man, but he's a White gay man. And for me the perception of being yet another Black gay male working under a White male sort of under his supervision, under his guidance, under his tutelage was complicated. (D)

But it's intriguing 'cause when we have [people-of-color-only] conversations, sometimes White peers will see it and become alarmed or uncomfortable, as if there's something going on they sort of should have access to and can't, or that they're sort of being excluded, when there's been no explicit sort of note of "Hey, you can't come over." We just happen to be having some conversation. (D)

The Provost for example – he's White - he won't acknowledge me, he won't look at me, you try to say hello to him. He just ignores you. And this is something that I get from so many of the White, straight White men at that institution. The ones who know my White

husband and me they're really cool. But most are cool with my husband but will not give me the time of day. I think for me it's too much difference for them. The Black thing they can understand if [my husband] was married to a Black woman or was with a White guy, but he's with not only a dude but a Black dude and a big Black dude. [They] can't handle that... [They] can't just so see that. (C)

Other noteworthy experiences recalled while interacting with White peers, staff, and faculty members were reflected in the following statements:

For me, I think more so White women have those kind of more ridged viewpoints. I think White gay males think because they're gay they get it across every identity. And I'm like, "That's not true." (M)

I think when you are a person of color and you are working in higher education you are always having to prove that you know what you're talking about. I've been tutoring for nine years. You can ask me just about anything about APA and I will tell you. But I will still have middle aged White women getting a bachelor's degree in social work who question my expertise on APA. Like, "Lady I do this every day all day. I'm telling you put the comma there." That type of thing it's ridiculousness. (C).

Major Theme Seven: Assigned Role as an Educator

All interviewees reported feeling responsible for, but also fatigued by, raising awareness in the graduate school community on issues of diversity and intersectionality. The examples which reflect the participants' experiences were:

So it's been intriguing sort of choosing when I will and won't educate, 'cause I think it can be taxing – no, I know it can be taxing to educate folks on how gay people have lived, what they experience, or even sort of how we have relationships. (D)

I do acknowledge that some of them are from very isolated places throughout the country and they may not experience people of color - or even lived in the city or urban spaces so it may be new and they may only know like television and informs there how they view Black people and people of color and all this stuff. (M)

But I think yeah I think there are people who get it and there are people who think they get it and there are people who don't get it at all. For example, I was talking to a friend of mine and she was like, "This dyke who came..." And I was like, "Whoa. That's not ok, why would you say that?" She got mad at me because I was challenging her. I'm like, "I don't appreciate that language." And she's like, "Well you're gay you're not a lesbian." I'm like, "Because I'm a gay I can't be offended by derogatory terms towards lesbians?" (M)

But yeah it's exhausting and sometimes I have to educated people like, "What does this mean? What does that mean?" I'm like, "Is it my job to tell you everything." (M)

Related to their experience of being an educator, all participant spoke specifically about the voluntary, and at time involuntary, aspects of the position "sole" educator on minority issues. For example, Jasen and Destin both recalled several class examples wherein issues of race or sexuality surfaced and everyone "looked at [him] to respond." All interviewees noted how uncomfortable these moments made them feel, as evidenced by the statements:

And we had the biggest battle of gender because the women, pretty much all women, believed that gender was written on the body. "Well gender is whether you're a man or a woman." And I said well that's not the case, there's a full spectrum of gender...they did not like to hear that. We really had some contentious battles over that. And I said, "Well you know there's transgender, there's cisgender, there's gender queer, there's two-spirit,

etc." They're like, "What are you talking about?" And so I felt like I really had to hold down spot for the LBGTs in the world and even my gay friends. (C)

I just gave them the world that I knew from my experience and reading and just being a queer person in the world. And I think some of them felt like, "Okay now I've learned something here that I didn't know." And others were like, "This is all fine but I'm just still not ready to make that leap." I remember in that class they were talking about it - it really was a class designed for the White women and not the rest of us. (C)

For a number of our students I'm probably the first Black male they've ever had as a teacher so they don't know what to expect. So teaching thus takes on multiple layers of complexity. (C)

I'm like, Okay well think about the people who live in those communities and how they might feel if they heard you say that if you go over there you'll die or "I don't see why I have to work with these people." And that's when I can't join those conversations and I have to really think to challenge or sometimes not challenge. (M)

I pick my battles. So I think sometimes it's fatiguing I'm just tired and I don't feel like commenting anymore. And sometimes it's - sometimes I may challenge it a different way. So instead of like saying like you're wrong I might say, "Well just think differently about those people in those communities. People actually live there and everyone's not shooting each other. It's not like a war zone." (M)

It's very hard, you're put in the spotlight a lot. I think because everyone knows who I am people are like, "How does everyone know you?" I always say, "I'm the only Black man in my cohort. Like I'm the only - people see me a lot by default." And I'm like, "There's

not that many people like me walking around.” So I think that's kind of like all eyes on me. Which puts a lot of pressure on me sometimes. I try to check that. (M)

I think I was very like - usually I can be kind of like more in an educator role like, "Let me just provide different perspectives so they can plant a seed and grow." (M)

Major Theme Eight: Intersectionality

Although participants indicated various experiences with intersectionality, two main areas emerged regarding the intersection of identities. All participants noted examples wherein assumptions were made based on their perceived minority status rather than them as a whole person, for example:

Yeah I think as far as my sexuality I have experienced that when people find out that I'm gay women want to get closer. Men especially White men want to move away. Unless they know my husband because my husband is White and he's very, very masculine and butch... I think sometimes the gay thing, being homosexual, for the women at least it's like "Oh I don't have to worry about him wanting to eye ball me or whatever." (C)

A lot of these students are first generation White kids and they come from conservative households. So they're already on guard because they think you're this Black guy who's going to be preaching multi-culturalism, Obama, this, this, this. And when they find out that you're gay that's just something else that they can hold against you. (C)

I describe my experience as a Black gay man as varying degrees of invisibility.

Sometimes I feel like I am really not seen for who I really am. And other times I think I am - I struggle because sometimes I think I'm waiting for the day somebody says “You're a fraud.” (C)

When people think of identities they don't intersect them at all. They think like, "Oh this is gay. This is homeless. This is being affluent or whatever. Or being Christian or Muslim." And to integrate that is really hard – it's really hard for people because they don't know what it looks like, it may be scary for them. So I don't think people really look at me as a gay man. They might, but I think they see me as Black man first. (M)

I have to say, it's been perhaps the weirdest and most unexpected aspect about attending a PWI. For example, I've had like Women objectify and sexualize my Black male physical appearance while neglecting the fact that I'm also gay. I've had guys say that their cool with hanging out and watching sports until they learn that I'm gay. (J)

Another aspect of intersectionality referenced by all participants related to an earlier sense of enjoyment, support, or validation that was later revealed to be metered by an awareness of how the interviewee was perceived by others. As such, the participants' statements that best serve to illuminate this dimension were:

It is problematic that when I'm on campus, in whatever role I'm in, I always think, "What are the other guys thinking?" When I'm a student, "Are they afraid to go into the bathroom when I'm there when I'm in the bathroom?" Or if we do group work are they going to feel weird doing reports with me. (C)

The suburbs are so different from the city because I think in the city you are just used to being around people of all different types but you never know. Especially with the White guys, okay, is it the Black thing or is it the gay thing what is it? Or is it that you just don't like me? (C)

I truly fell for the fallacy that my peers “didn’t see color,” that they saw me. But I later learned that I was lured into a false sense of security, they – they really saw color and almost exclusively color...I should have expected it, I am Black after all. (J)

And even today at 41 and I've lived, and the masculinity and everything, I still am conscious about sometimes the way I sit or my voice. And I hate the fact that I'm always thinking, "What are these straight White guys thinking about me." And really I don't give a [expletive]. I don't care because I go home to a fabulous life. I have a fantastic life with friends and my husband and art and interest but no one wants to be judged just because you're the Black guy or the woman or the gay guy, you're the trans guy. We all want to be included. (C)

I always put it back on other people. I always keep thinking, "How do I present myself? How does the world see me? What do the students think about me?" I keep thinking, "Are students not coming in for tutoring because of me? Am I too rough in my tutoring style?" There was a period where I was just angry about this. I was just an angry man. So I think my challenge is trying to defy stereotypes a lot, I don't want to be seen as the angry Black guy. I don't want to be seen as this effeminate gay guy. (C)

I think knowing that I was gay softened my identity. I think I became less threatening and I wasn't necessarily the - I don't think I could easily be identified as an angry Black man in [my school] space. (D)

Compared to other Black men in the program across different years that I felt as though - people would gravitate towards me a bit more because I was softer than everyone else...I think I felt safer because I was gay. (M)

Major Theme Nine: Self-Awareness and Self-Perception

All participants endorsed three discernable aspects of this theme. First, participants all indicated that an awareness of the multi marginalized statuses granted them access to a level of uniqueness experienced by a few. For example, Destin stated,

I think to some degree being Black and gay strengthened the decision to enrolled at a PWI, because it underlines my uniqueness even more, and sort of highlights the space I really come from – in being distinct, so multiple oppressions really frame how I think about clinical psychology, how I operate in research, why I care about people who are multi-marginalized.

Other participants stated:

For me, it's being able to offer a different perspective...I feel like being Black and gay has given me the space to do that. Not to say that everybody that is queer gets out on the fringe and do weird whippy do stuff. But I like that. I like that I hail from a tradition of men, artists, intellectuals, politicians, activists, who have had to go out and step beyond and become outliers in order for other people to come in and do different things. (C)

I won't assimilate - which is another reason why I feel like I have to be more authentic because I feel like if I'm sacrificing and compromising who I am then I'm minimizing the Black gay experience. (M)

I think it's important for people - Black gay men particularly – to have and express their robust narrative. It's a lot of pressure understand that. People look at you as like - they look to you to either reinforce stereotypes or they're looking to you to break down stereotypes and depending on who you are...I tell people I think stereotypes, not that they're untrue, it's that they're incomplete. (M)

Second, participants all referenced self-awareness/self-perception as a modulating factor in self-presentation and remarked:

Just now, there's an inflection in my - I noticed that I lifted my voice a little bit higher so I could be a little bit softer in my approach so I wouldn't come across kind of like aggressive...which I've changed I've worked on that. I've worked on that over the years.
(M)

I think stereotype threats. Like, "You don't want to feed the stereotypes. You don't want to prove them right. You don't want to step on any toes." (M)

I wouldn't appreciate all of me being seen and affirmed and respected because I think the way the message we get from society is more so like - some people have this perception - I've heard this before - not at [my school] outside of [my school] but, "Oh gay men are super queenie and they like going to the ball and duh, duh, duh, duh." And I'm like, "Okay there's the box that I don't even fit in, so now I don't even qualify as a gay man or a gay Black man." (M)

Third, participants all referenced age as it related to increase in sense of self and self-acceptance. Several participants remarked:

Well when you get to be over 40 you're pretty much - like I'm over everything. I will say because I've been with my husband so long. We've been together 18 years. And so this is the most significant relationship of my life... but he was not prepared for everything he got with me. (C)

And this has always been and just sitting with you now it's just like a revelation to me that this has always been how my life has been for the last 20 years, education and my love life have always been mixed. And as a student now I'm grateful for it. I see it. I don't

know if people thinking I'm getting special advantages because I'm essentially married to the history department. (C)

I was 26 when I began my program, so I was pretty cemented by the time I got there and being comfortable in my own skin sort of allowed to better navigate spaces that weren't necessarily the most welcoming. (D)

I may be younger than some of my peers, but I'm good with me. With each passing year I growing increasingly more excited about the man and professional I am becoming. (J).

There was variability within each minor theme in the uniqueness of each participant's life experience which is reflected by the varying number quote per theme.

Minor Theme One: Connectedness

Jasen, Clayton, and Marcel referenced the presence or absence of a sense of connectedness while enrolled at a PWI. For Jasen, he noted that the companionship he found was often times built out of a need to be connected to someone who can related by having had experienced similar circumstances. Other participants remarked:

A friend of mine who is also gay he teaches part time at [X school], we really became friends not because we have all that much in common but because we were like the only two out guys in the program and we felt like we need to stick together. (C)

It was just so comforting to be there with another man...I just wanted to kiss this guy. I want to kiss him not only because he's young and handsome but because he's taking me away from all the crap of the administration. He's taking me away for this hour we're together, and we're working on this paper, he's taking me away from so many of the tensions of being on that campus where I have to switch roles. And I feel like I have to be

different people at different moments of the day. And I'm like I want to thank you for this hour of just conversation about history. (C)

But with the African American administrators we actually do a thing where we try to meet each month...and most of them are women. (C)

I just can't tell you how amazing it felt to meet another Black gay male who is also in higher [education], I felt like "Ok I'm not as alone as I thought, I have someone with whom I can connect and understand." (J)

Minor Theme Two: Code Switching

Jasen and Marcel referenced the presence, and necessity, to utilize code switching in order to acquiesce of their school's climate. For example, Marcel stated:

And I think just like every day – it's kind of really bad having to code switch for White people...I can use more of my vernacular with other African American students. (M)

So there's different layers of code switching. So there's like the Black vernacular, generally speaking and then there's like Black gay talk. And then there's like talking a majority of peers are going to understand you. Like I didn't realize like my first year I'm like, "Why am I so tired all the time. Why don't I feel like talking all the time?" I realized because I'm switching of how I'm speaking. I'm being so mindful of how I'm talking and it's like exhausting...but yeah I realized I was code switching out a lot and it's something that I've never really had to do until I started to go to my school. (M)

Minor Theme Three: Importance of Support and Guidance

Clayton, Destin, and Marcel referenced the importance of support and guidance while existing in a predominately White space. For example, participants stated:

For a Black gay male student who chooses to attend a PWI I would say find somebody, find that person who is also an other. Whether it's the trans* woman or the only Asian woman in the program. The only other Black person. I think you've got to have support. You have to be secure in who you are. And you cannot focus on what other people are thinking...When it comes to encounters with Caucasians, you're going to have to be more generous. You're going to have to be the more generous person because some of them are not willing to budge. (C)

So for a while I just was not seeking support. I was choosing to try to barrel through on like brainpower and sort of just achieve, achieve, achieve, rather than sort of engage the personal/emotional aspects. But that's very taxing, and I found myself reaching a breaking point. And what I ended up doing was having monthly visits with [my family] and – they gave me a grounding space. So seeing them - spending time with them - allowed me to sort of refill my emotional batteries...but just sort of spending that time was good for me to have a reset button, because the place where I go to school, the area, is very microaggressive. (D)

You've got to find somebody in that department who can speak for you and knows who you are because she's there or he's there and are like, "I get you." (C)

There are Black student groups, there's a Black student group, there's a Latino student group so. I think there's even one that's like merged now like a multi-cultural group. I don't even know I think someone had an issue with why are we separate why don't we all come together. So there's spaces for like people of color to come together. There aren't any spaces for sexual and gender minorities to meet together. (M)

Prepare for a culture shock. I would say definitely have some friends, well that depends too. I think some people of color don't identify with their ethnicity sometimes. I'd say try to have support systems that includes some like-minded people so you can stay grounded and not compromise your identities. (M)

Minor Theme Four: Not Meeting Preconceived Notions

Jasen and Marcel referenced the significance of the preconceived ideal of others. For example, the participants stated:

So I'd never been in a predominately White school before. So just walking in just feeling different. Just looking around not seeing anyone that looks like me was kind of new for me. And then I begin to get the stereotypical comments, like "Oh you're different than other African Americans" or "You're not like my other gay friends." (M)

I've been told that I don't act gay or act like other Blacks...I just stop and think what in heck is that supposed to mean. Going to my school took some adjusting – adjusting to the fact some people are so ignorant that they can't even comprehend anything that's "outside of the normative imaginary box." (J)

Minor Theme Five: Adverse Impact(s) on Academic Performance

Jasen, Clayton, and Destin referenced the impact that exposure to continuous microaggressive experiences has had on their academic performance. One interviewee, Destin, noted a continuous perception, by others, that his research of other people of color was somehow less than and biased. As such, he endeavored to work harder than their White peers in order to counter this perception. For example, the participants stated:

I try not to think about it even though I'm the type of person who does ruminate on that type of stuff all time...it does carry over into how much I put into my school work or

involvement in class...like “What’s this person thinking about me or how are they perceiving me?” (C)

I’ve slowly learned to fade into the background, although that’s kind of because I’m the only person of color. I got to a point that it was too taxing to always have to worry about everything I said, did, or didn’t say or do. It definitely had an impact on my school performance. I learned to not address certain issues, or not volunteer to be the “by default” guy who gets to address the difficult topics. (J)

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Examining the intersecting identities of a marginalized population, particularly of individuals who identify with multiple minority statuses, is principally important given the daily struggles with microaggressions, pressures in academia, and long-term socioemotional implications. The study was conducted utilizing a semi-structured interview that was created to address the different intersections of gender, race, sexual orientation, and academia. The investigator elected to not utilize any one theory as a means of assessing or interpreting the participants' data as it would not provide an adequate structure to discuss the results of the interviews. The nuanced intersections of the participants' identities were too complex and overlapping to be parsed apart adequately by any one theory or model. For example, Cross (1991) described a theory of Black racial identity development (i.e., nigrescence) that takes place in five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. More specifically Cross (1991) stated:

Pre-encounter (stage 1) depicts the identity to be changed; *Encounter* (stage 2) isolates the point at which the person feels compelled to change; *Immersion- Emersion* (stage 3) describes the vortex of identity change; and *Internalization and Intemalization-Commitment* (stages 4 and 5) describe the habituation and internalization of the new identity. (p. 190)

Because Cross (1991) based his theory on previous studies conducted by early psychologists who aimed to explore “the psychological existence of Blackness in a white world” (p. 3). Their research focused heavily on Blacks in varying stages of racial identity development. Cross (1991) and others did not consider that individuals possess multiple identities, and that those identities can vary in salience and significance depending on a myriad of factors.

As a result of this limitation, the investigator decided that the best way to organize the results of the interviews was thematically, in other words being able to address themes regardless if they related to any one theory or model. This approach facilitated a more holistic picture of the participants lived experiences as well as a glimpse into how they have come to navigate their intersecting identities. It is important to remember that although very distinct themes emerged relating to the navigation of identities, there was still some overlap amongst the themes.

Black gay males may experience an inordinate amount of stress related to racism, homophobia and heterosexism while attending PWIs (Evans & Wall, 1991; Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2009). In addition to endorsing the study's hypothesis and existing literature, all participants recalled notable experiences which further solidified the prevalence, as well as the impact, of experiencing microaggressions, discrimination, bias, and prejudice while attending a PWI. Examples which highlighted the impact of being the recipient of negative or uninformed affronts were evidenced while interviewing each participant. From being told that they were "not like other Blacks" because they were pursuing higher education to being invalidated and perceived as "just an angry queer Black gay getting angry again," the lived experiences of each participant again revealed just how prevalent and impactful these experiences can be on one's sense of being and overall identity.

Research on microaggressions and subtle forms of prejudice suggest concern for three major psychological dilemmas: (1) damaging effects caused by the friction between the dominant and socially undervalued group realities, (2) the apparent invisibility of both intentional and unintentional bias, and (3) the deceptive downplay of perceived harm by microaggressions (Sue, 2010a). In speaking to the first point, Sue (2010a) noted that group-specific experiences mold and bias their perception of reality. As an example, the author

indicated that many White individuals seem to be under the impression that racism is no longer a major problem. Contrastingly, many Black individuals have continued to report constant and continuing moments of prejudice and racism. Regarding this study, all participants referenced some degree of perceived racism and sense of being disregarded by an individual who did not identify as a person of color.

In speaking to the second point, Sue (2010b) referenced that cultural conditioning and socialization has been shown to spur subtle prejudices and typecasts about various ethnic minority groups, resulting in what some would call ‘culturally inherited biases.’ This predispose inclination towards certain biases also contributes the prior psychological dilemma of conflicting realities. All participants, Jasen, Clayton, Destin, and Marcel, spoke passionately and poignantly about this matter. From Jasen noting that others objectified him, to Marcel monitoring the inflection in his voice, each and every participant provided evidence that would seem to support the notion of culturally inherited biases, be they of one’s own culture or another.

In addressing the final point, that of whitewashing the perceived impact of microaggressive experiences, Sue (2010c) noted and explored several areas of functioning that are often impacted, such as biological/physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and psychological. While each participant spoke on each domain, to varying degrees, their overall message was clear, that microaggressive experiences were present and had influenced their functioning in some way. For instance, Jasen, Clayton, and Marcel specifically noted that they grew increasingly self-aware of their demeanor and verbal/non-verbal communications shortly after enrolling at their PWIs. More specifically, all participants remarked on the impact of other’s neglect or lack of awareness around the prevalence and impact of microaggressive experiences.

For one participant, Jasen, the constant invalidation led him to be more isolative and withdrawn while on campus.

In continuing this line of thought, the presence of racial and sexual orientation microaggressions also had an impact on the self-perception and self-presentation of each participant. For instance, during the interview Marcel stated, “Just now, there’s an inflection in my – I noticed that I lifted my voice a little bit higher so I could be a little bit softer in my approach, so I wouldn’t come across kind of like aggressive...which I’ve changed, I’ve worked on that over the years.” This particular example was selected for two crucial reasons. One, it highlighted the degree to which an individual can be aware and reliant on self-perception and – presentation as a means of navigating various environments (i.e., recognizing that by simply being Black and male, other peers, staff, or faculty were more likely to perceive a stern tone are aggressive). Second, it showed how continuous feedback, albeit positive or negative, can grow to become an intrinsic or embedded part of one’s overall identity. Marcel described experiencing numerous instances wherein overt and subtle cues were conveyed regarding his tonality, pitch, or overall speech. Marcel, in addition to the other participants, also noted that the feedback that he received since being enrolled at a PWI not only influenced how he approached others, but it also elicited a need to continuously “be on” (i.e., continuously scanning oneself and the environment to determine how best to respond in order to garner a certain response and be perceived in a certain manner by others).

As was noted earlier in the study, Loiacano (1989) referenced three themes that related to the lived experiences of minority students: (1) finding validation in the gay and lesbian community, (2) finding validation in the Black community, and (3) the need to integrate identities. Regarding the first theme, all participants noted varying degrees of negative than

positive experiences with LGBT students who were also not students of color. For example, Clayton remarked that while he felt close to a classmate who identified as Hispanic and gay, he nevertheless felt that this classmate did not understand his experiences. Conversely, Marcel noted that White gay classmates and faculty members often used the fact that they were gay as an indicator that they understood the experiences of LGBT people of color. Regarding the second theme discussed by Loiacano (1989), the responses of the participants varied significantly. For instance, Destin and Marcel indicated that they often sought the company of other students, staff, and faculty of color. However, Jasen and Clayton shared that they experienced positive and negative interactions with students, staff, and faculty of color. As such, it is unclear as why each participant experiences such unique interaction with minorities.

The third theme, the need to integrate identities, was most exemplified as each participant reference their experiences with intersectionality. Jasen, for example, remarked about the difficulties he experienced due to others' assumptions based on his skin color. He noted that because of his demeanor and physical appearance that at times he felt sexually objectified when other assume he was straight or distanced when other learned that he was gay. These experiences inclined Jansen to distinguish his identities (i.e., while on campus letting others assume he was straight out of concern that a correction would create distance between him and that peer). Conversely, Destin experiences were one of complete identity integration. Destin shared that over his entire upbringing his family and friends facilitated and promoted his sense of self and identity. When Destin enrolled at his current school, he noted that he was openly proud to be a Black gay cisgender male.

Given the difficulties Black gay male graduate students may face at PWIs, their ways of finding social support, approaching difficulties, and ultimately persisting can arguably be

regarded as a specialized form of resiliency and coping. Although the presence and valence of mentors and role models varied among participants, each interviewee remarked about the importance of having someone present on campus who could empathize with their lived experiences. While Jasen and Destin shared examples that they regarded as “misguided” or “adversarial,” Clayton and Marcel remarked about the positive aspects of having someone on campus with whom they felt acknowledged and affirmed their intersecting identities. For example, Marcel recalled that he developed a close bond with a faculty member on campus who also identified as Black and gay. He described feeling “safe” and “heard” whenever he would visit this faculty member. However, when this faculty member parted ways with the institution, Marcel noted that he felt “lost” and without a place to go to feel affirmed. As such, Marcel felt less supported and connected at school.

Another area the study explored related to the challenges Black gay male graduate students faced due to issues around intersecting minority statuses. Specifically, this study examined students’ perceptions on how race, sexual orientation, and their role as a student influenced their experiences at a PWI. As was noted by Nadal (2013), disproportionately less research has been completed that focuses on the intersection of sexual orientation and racial identity. What research has been produced indicated that gay people of color are doubly marginalized by mainstream society not only for their racial perspective but also for their sexual orientation (Kumashiro, 2002; Nadal, 2013; Sue, 2010a). Each participant spoke specifically about the varying impacts of intersectionality that emanated from self as well as others. For instance, Clayton stated,

I describe my experience as a Black gay man as varying degrees of invisibility.

Sometimes I feel like I am really not seen for who I really am. And other times I think I

am – I struggle because sometimes I think I’m waiting for the day somebody says
“You’re a fraud.”

Clayton’s statement highlighted the degree to which he has become aware of how other perceive or misperceive aspect of his identity.

Varying degrees of invisibility seemed to be a pervasive undertone among all participants. As a consequence of experiencing continuous instances of invisibility, Black gay male graduate students are thus subjected to possibly experiencing multiple oppressions (Loicano, 1989). In expounding on this area, several authors suggested that Black gay men might cope in a variety of manners, such as affiliating with one community more than the other (Icard, 1986), attempting to integrate their identities (Loicano, 1989), or by placing their identities along a hierarchy (Brown, 2005). Clayton, in particular, seemed to utilize varying degrees of the prior mentioned coping strategies, such as identifying more with Black female classmates, accepting that he is a “built” Black gay male who is often misperceived as a straight and “angry” male, and recognizing his power and privilege as a male and faculty member.

In looking at the participant’s experiences holistically, understanding the experiences of Black gay male graduate students thus becomes critical for increasing the likelihood of persistence, improving and maintaining physical and mental health, and facilitating a sense of belonging, positive visibility, and agency.

Limitations and Unexpected Variables

Limitations are inherent to all research designs. One clear, and unintended, limitation of this study related to the sample being comprised of graduate students from similar graduate level programs, as such the results of this study can only be generalized to the Black gay cisgender male graduate students attending a Midwestern predominantly white institution.

The following variable, while impactful for each participant were not considered to be limitations for this research study. For example, participants' employment at their respective institutions revealed itself to be an unexpected influential factor. Employment for each participant held varying degrees of valence and importance. Clayton, for instance, was employed as a fulltime faculty member, while Destin was employed as a part time graduate level student teacher. While all participants noted that their employment played a role in their overall experience at a PWI, this aspect of their identities should be assessed further for its potential importance in helping or hindering how individuals identify with multiple minority status.

Similarly, another noticeable variable related to the varying degree of salience of participants' identities (e.g., viewing race as primary vs. sexual orientation, and vice-versa). This area is worthy of attention and further exploration because how one self-identifies might influence how certain occurrences or environments are experienced.

An unexpected influence factor from the study related to varying degrees of experience or exposure to PWIs prior to participants' current enrollment. This aspect of the study is noteworthy because of the dissimilar impact of exposure to a PWI had on participants' experience at their current institution. For instance, Marcel noted that because he attended a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) prior, this experience served somewhat as a buffer as he learned to navigate the environment at his current institution.

Researcher Dynamics

While not considered a limitation, the role of the investigator as the interviewer necessitate a brief discussion. Creswell (2012) noted that he would make statements regarding his overall bracketing and epoché process at the beginning of his phenomenology or in his methodology section as he discussed the role of the researcher. In phenomenological research epoché is described as a process involved in blocking biases and assumptions in order to explain

a phenomenon in terms of its own inherent system of meaning (Creswell, 2012). One actual technique is known as bracketing which is regarded as systematic steps to "set aside" various assumptions and beliefs about a phenomenon in order to examine how the phenomenon presents itself in the world of the participant.

As such, the central role of researchers within qualitative research methods necessitates the exploration of the researchers' personal values, assumptions, and biases prior to data collections and analysis (Creswell, 2012). Some of my identified assumptions were (1) participants will have experienced racial microaggressions and will be open to speaking about them, (2) Black gay graduate students will largely find support among peers of color who have had similar experiences with racial or sexual orientation microaggressions, (3) Black gay male students will feel as though they are a representation of their race and orientation in and outside of classroom interactions, (4) Black gay students from predominantly White communities will be less aware of and/or may excuse/dismiss or minimize experienced racial and/or sexual orientation microaggressions, (5) Black gay men will perceive that Whites often attempt to question, dismiss, or minimize the validity of their experiences, (6) Black gay men will perceive their educational environment as disappointing or unwelcoming, (7) Black gay men will be under the impression that they are often stereotyped (e.g. ignorant, loud, "over-the-top," tactless, low class, "ghetto," angry, or "tasteful" or "tasteless"), (8) Black gay men will have had to contend with being a representative, educating others, avoiding stereotype, and maintaining interracial friendships, (9) Black gay men will have been ridiculed for "acting White" or treated as an exception to the rule, (10) Black gay men will have had to balance responding to racial and/or sexual orientation slights while as also believing that they are "overthinking" certain exchanges, (11) Black gay men will have experiences wherein they were unsure/second-guessed how best to

respond to race- or sexual orientation-related challenges, and (12) Black gay men will have used negative encounters with racism or sexual orientation slights as motivation to achieve.

While I, as a researcher, endeavored to bracket my own biases, I also recognized the impact my presence might have had during the study. As was noted by Watt (2007), “the researcher is the primary “instrument” of data collection and analysis, reflexivity is deemed essential” (p. 82). As such, through reflection researchers may become aware of what allows them to see, as well as what may inhibit their seeing (Watt, 2007). For me, this entailed careful consideration of the phenomenon under study, as well the ways in which my own assumptions and behaviors might have impacted the inquiry. For instance, during the interview with each participant there were often moments, verbal and non-verbal, wherein the participants conveyed their assumptions of me (e.g., “As a Black man yourself I bet you get it”). While no verbal confirmation or denial was provided during the interview, I cannot help but consider what non-verbal cues were introduced on my part. As a Black gay cisgender male graduate student at a Predominantly White Institution, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my identification with Jasen, Clayton, Destin, and Marcel. Rather than consider my presence a limitation, it can be regarded as an asset. The individuals in this study gifted me with a chance to hear and learn about their lived experience, and the fact that I identified with them seemed to only bolster the trust that was established during the process.

Future Research

Several areas for future research that are suggested by the current study include (1) an expanded qualitative examination to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of graduate students who identify with multiple minority statuses, (2) an investigation of the lived experiences of minority students enrolled in other areas of study, (3) a longitudinal exploration of racial identity and sexual orientation development of graduate

students, (4) an in-depth analysis of the subtle nature of racial and sexual orientation microaggressions, (5) an expansion of the number of interviews, (6) a deeper analysis of the various means of coping when faced with microaggressions (i.e., assessing humor as a resilience factor within the navigation of identities may prove to be fruitful), and (7) an examination of the perceived impact of investigators conducting research within a community with which they also identify.

Implications and Recommendations

The study's results suggest several courses of action for university faculty and staff, and administrators, and for Black gay cisgender males. These recommendations are listed and justified below.

For Faculty and Staff Members

Faculty and staff help to create the campus culture and are often regarded as a source of support for many students. Faculty, in particular, can play a pivotal role in the academic lives of all students on campus; as such their presence and influence is crucial to the creation of campus environment that inclines all students to remain enrolled, persist and graduate (Wallace, 2013). One recommendation for faculty and staff based on this study is to participate in, connect with, and take away something from diversity trainings. This recommendation stemmed from the data wherein participants shared their experiences with racism, homophobia, and a general lack of awareness in the classroom and also noted that they felt their lived experiences were discounted or disregarded due to a lack of support by professors. As such, all students may benefit from faculty and staff members' exploration of the stereotypes they hold towards various racial and sexual minorities.

Another recommendation to emerge upon completing the study related to implicit biases. It is thus recommended that staff and faculty be mindful of how implicit bias, which participants

reported being able to perceive, influence everyone's verbal and nonverbal actions in the classroom (Wallace, 2013). Lun, Sinclair, and Cogburn (2009) implored faculty and staff to be aware of how implicit bias can manifest itself while on campus or in the classroom. This recommendation advances the professional development suggested in the recommendation above. While research suggested that individual who identify with multiple minority status might feel that they are often ignored in the classroom by instructors (Sue, 2010), participants in the current study noted that they were called upon in excess. While this might show that staff and faculty are attempting to attend to their biases, by calling upon minority students more frequently, instructor should consider ways in which to engage all students in the learning process. Taken together, these recommendations may help to decrease the impact of perceived racial and sexual orientation discrimination on campus.

For Administrators

Administrators and higher education professionals are often looking for ways in which to retain minority students and help them to successfully matriculate. Notably, qualitative data showed that Black gay male graduate students had negative experiences on campus specifically as it relates to campus administration and course curricula. Participants in this study each expressed negative experiences with courses and coursework that they deemed to be "depreciating," "outdated," and "just not for us." As such, it is recommended that graduate level program create and encourage opportunities for cross-racial dialogues, both formal and informal among students. Presently there is limited literature related to inter-group dialogues, however, the results reported in this study demonstrated that such interactions might have positive outcomes for many student, regardless of individual sexual and racial identities.

For Minority Students

Recommendations may also be made to the population from which this study's participants were drawn. These recommendations are gleaned from the qualitative data as well as the extant literature: (1) seek support from likeminded and goal-oriented peers, faculty/ staff and student organizations, (2) if possible increase involvement in campus or community groups, particularly Black and/or LGBT-related organizations, (3) know the resources available to you on campus that may afford you with a safe space to report and discuss racially or sexually discriminatory behavior, (4) find someone or someone place that affirms one's identities and lived experiences.

For Clinicians

Although this study assessed the lived experiences of Black gay cisgender male graduate students at PWIs, implications for mental health practice remains relevant nonetheless. Racial, gender, and sexual orientation microaggressions can occur in a variety of human encounters and interaction. As such, it is conceivable that microaggressions can manifest within a client-therapist dyad. As noted by Sue (2010a), microaggressions within the therapeutic relationship can "provoke mistrust toward majority group members from marginalized groups, impair the quality and nature of relationships, and prevent target individuals or groups from receiving needed services" (p. 275). While many mental health agencies, hospitals, businesses, industries, schools, and place of employment promote a commitment to diversity and offer diversity training, Sue (2010a) reminds us that "traditional training such as taking courses, workshops, and reading the professional literature on diverse groups in our society may be helpful but it seems to have minimal effect on implicit biases" (p. 276). As such, one recommendation for mental health professionals is to recognize that multicultural training aids in acquiring knowledge and skills, but it often does not challenge the professional to assess and change unconscious and

unintentional biases. As such, it is proposed that mental health professionals (1) learn about individuals who identify as a minority from people or groups within that community, (2) discover knowledge about marginalized groups from sources other than mass media, educational material written from the perspective of the dominant group, and colleagues/friends/relatives/neighbors, (3) recognize that experiential learning is a necessary supplement to factual knowledge, (4) remain vigilant of overt and subtle biases and fears.

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Appendix A: Interview Tool

Demographic questions

- What is your age?
- How do you identify your race?
- How do you identify your sexual orientation?
- Are you currently enrolled in a graduate program at a Predominantly White Institution?
 - How long have you been enrolled?

Racial/Ethnic & Sexual Identity Development

- In terms of race and sexual orientation?
 - If applicable, how open are you with others on campus about being gay?
 - If applicable, what factors went into your decision to disclose/not disclose your sexual orientation?
 - Did your decision to come out impact any of your relationships? (Peers, Professors, and/or staff) If so, how?
- How has being a Black man affected, or not affected, your decision about coming out?
 - That is, were there certain things that you were taught as a Black man that contradicted with your gay identity?
- As you developed and became more aware of your identity, please describe the challenge(s) that you experienced with family? Friends? Peer? School?

Experiences as a student at a PWI

- What factors went into your decision to attend your school?
- How would you describe your experiences as a Black gay man [overall] at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)?
- Do you know of any other Black graduate students at your school?
 - Are any of them male and/or gay?
 - If applicable, describe your relationship with other Black students on this campus.
- If applicable, what has your experience been in interacting with different groups (e.g. heterosexual White peers)?
 - How do you feel when making the transitions between different groups?
- If applicable, describe your experience(s) with racial, ethnic, or sexual discrimination on campus?
 - How did you respond? How did others respond?
- As a Black gay male graduate student, where do you turn for support?
- Describe your biggest challenge(s) of being Black and gay at a PWI.
- Describe your greatest rewards being both Black and gay at a PWI.
- What advice would you give to a Black gay male student who chooses to attend a PWI?

Concluding Questions

- How have you felt talking about these issues?
- Are there any questions that you thought I would have asked that I did not, and you would like to address now?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add that you didn't get to add earlier?

Appendix B: Figures of Themes Across Participants

