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Microaggression in the College Enviroment: Narratives of

African American students at a Predominatly White Institution

(TITLE)

BY

Courtney Lynette Jones

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

The study examined narrative experiences of microaggression from African American college students attending a Predominately White institution (PWI). Participants consisted of a combination of undergraduate and graduate students from a mid-size Midwestern institution of higher education. A qualitative approach was taken through a two-step series, first an email was sent to participants to obtain experiences of microaggression. After, a semi-formal follow-up interview was conducted to collect data for the research. The findings reported all six participants' experienced intentional and unintentional microaggression on various places of the college campus such as, the classroom, campus offices, campus police department, and campus-events. Microaggression was broken into three forms that all participants experienced: microassault, microaggression, and microinsult. The study concluded that African American college students have experienced microaggression at a PWI, especially in the classroom.

DEDICATION

I dedicated this thesis to my family. There are no words to describe the support and love that I received throughout this time. My wonderful husband Jeffton, I appreciate you encouraging me to work harder. When I did not have motivation to continue, you kept reminding me to keep pushing. I could not have completed this without you. My beautiful daughter Cassidy, I love you so much. You kept me sane through it all with your playful spirit. The late nights and early mornings were worth it. My smart little sister, Brittany, no matter what I could always count on you to vent to when times were rough. To my beautiful mother, Vickie, Thank you for being a light at the end of the tunnel. You have been an inspiration since I can remember. To my praying grandmother, Lexie, thank you for being a woman of God. Your faith has influenced me to continue in this journey.

I would also like to dedicate this to my spiritual parents, Bishop Robinson and Wanda Kay. Thank you very much for your constant prayers and support throughout this time on completion of my thesis. Thank you for sitting down with me and helping me each sentence at a time. Last, but not least, I would like to dedicate my thesis to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There would be no me without this. I am glad that the Lord placed all these people in my life to ensure my success. It does not stop here, I am still on my journey.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The function of the university is not simply to teach bread-winning, or to furnish

teachers for the public schools, or to be a centre of polite society; it is, above all,

to be the organ of that fine adjustment which forms the secret of civilization (Du

Bois, 1973, p. 84).

These words spoken at the turn of the 20th by W.E.B. Du Bois, the first African American

to receive a doctorate from Harvard University, century imagined the function of an

institution of higher learning as serving all individuals. However, even while attending

an Ivy League institution of higher education in the United States, no one attempted to

initiate a conversation with Du Bois: "I did not seek them, and naturally they did not seek

me out" (Du Bois, 1968, p. 134). W.E.B Du Bois experienced a form of discrimination at

a time when it was widely acceptable. It is safe to assume that these experiences did not

hinder Du Bois, as he went on to live a life that made his one of the most recognized

African Americans names today.

More than a century later, African Americans are still living in a separate society,

as many continue to be plagued by the 'remnants of slavery' due to racial

microaggression which is an ongoing, persistent problem that requires deeper research in

America. The term was first coined by Pierce (1970), a psychiatrist and Harvard

university professor who studied African Americans' interactions with White Americans.

Through his research he addressed the type of change that would have to come from both

parties. Few people realize the disturbing effect this has on African Americans

(Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Racial microaggressions have been defined as "subtle,

stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal' exchanges which are 'put downs' of blacks by offenders" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978, p. 66) and as "stunning, automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of black inferiority" (Davis, 1989, p. 1576). Sue et al. (2007) defined it as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color" (p. 271Pierce's research is well-known regarding his theories based on the way African Americans handle microaggression (Griffith, 1998). According to Pierce (1989), microaggression takes on a defensive route wherein African Americans begin to partake in distrustful thinking and it can gradually destroy their self-confidence with interacting with other races.

Several studies have documented the experiences of Blacks' encounters with unfair treatment on college campuses which are attributed to race (e.g. Kim, 2016; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2012; Pittman, 2012). More often than not, African American students do not directly combat microaggressions when they occur in the college setting (Ditman, 2002). Instead, they may become silent and withdrawn, increasingly absent from class, develop low self-esteem, or become distracted by microaggressions so much that their course performance and grades suffer (Dittman, 2002). Due to this ever-present problem, it behooves one to expose and investigate microaggressions in and out of the classroom to increase understanding of the negative consequences and effects they have on African Americans in hopes that an appreciation and respect for all students will eventually form.

Though the adverse effects of overt racism have been well acknowledged (Boatright-Horowitz, Frazier, Harps-Lorgan, & Crocket, 2013; Poteat, & Spanierman, 2012), incidents of microaggression can sometimes be dismissed. In fact, a number of electronic media articles (e.g. McWhorter, 2014) have come out denouncing the term and bearing headlines like "The Microaggression Farce: The latest campus fad, which interpreted racism as being everywhere, thus it will create a new generation of permanent victims" (Mac Donald, 2014, p.1). Responses like this could undermine efforts to bring positive awareness of microaggression to the society at large, impeding the process of creating truly inclusive environments.

The Civil Rights and Higher Education Acts of the 1960s gave first-time access to students of color to the United States higher education institutions. Furthermore, as cited in the National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES] the percentage of Whites enrolled in all postsecondary degree-granting institutions is expected to increase 7 % between 2012 and 2023, and 25 % for Blacks (Hussar, & Bailey, 2016). This statistic indicates that White faculty, staff, and students will have an increasing number of encounters with Black students. For some White students, the college classroom will be their first real interaction with African Americans, as some may not have been exposed to people of color prior to coming to college (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Sue, 2010). Instead, their prior knowledge could have been informed by news media, social media, pop culture, and dinner table conversations.

One strategy that colleges have used to accommodate for the increasing amount of diversity on their campuses is instituting diversity in hiring practices, curriculum, and staff training. In a national survey of colleges and universities conducted by the American

Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), 63% reported that higher education institutions either had diversity education incorporated in their undergraduate curriculum, or the institution expected to address diversity in the near future (AACU, 2003). Many have invested significant resources to diversity training (mandatory or voluntary) for their staff, faculty, and administrators (Campbell-Whatley, Merriweather, Lee, & Toms, 2016). Sue (2010), a researcher on microaggression, was provided an opportunity to coordinate diversity training. While he attended this important training, he stated, "As I look around the room and at the sea of faces before me, I am struck by the fact that not a single one of you seems to be a visible racial ethnic minority. Do you know the message you are sending to me and the people of color on this campus?" (p. 26).   In addition, some universities have classes on cultural inclusion, but it may not be enough to handle the ever growing multicultural environment (Paluck, 2006).

Some African American students are attracted to predominately White institutions (PWI) because they are starting to utilize the word "diversity" throughout their campus. Diversity departments have been established on college campuses to assist their students, but it may not be enough to retain students that are having negative experiences within the classroom (Smith & Hawkins, 2011). For example, African Americans attending the University of Missouri protested because of the non-verbal and direct verbal threats encountered not only around the campus, but also within their classrooms (Eligon & Pérez-Peña, 2015; Watanabe & Song, 2015). It was reported that the protestors made up of faculty, staff, students, community members, etc. demanded a list from the university to help ease the racial tension such as cultural inclusion training and hiring more faculty of color (Eligon & Pérez-Peña, 2015).

African American students endure facing isolation and discrimination at a PWI (McCorkle, 2012). The students may not have been able to feel welcomed within the learning environment, thus feeling devalued. Students may even be afraid to speak up regarding the matter. To make the problem worse, African American students and their parents are often viewed by their White peers as paranoid, critical or simply difficult; they are "faulted for academic troubles, for self-segregation, and for "paranoia" about racism when they should be working harder" (Feagin, 1996, p. 80). However, it is the responsibility of the university to be aware that there is a real issue that is occurring within their campuses every day. Universities must make an effort to make sure that every individual in the classroom is in a positive learning environment. Students need to be aware that they have a voice to speak up when uncomfortable situations arise.

Purpose of Study

As a Black female, I have experienced multiple incidents of microaggression both in and out of the classroom. My goal of achieving good grades failed due to low-confidence while being enrolled in a PWI. I did not have confidence in myself because it was perceived that I was not capable of learning the way others did. I was curious about the experiences of other African American students, and their own experiences with racial microaggression in college spaces especially in the classroom. The literature on racial microaggression in higher education has historically focused on the general campus climate (Hardwood et al., 2012; McCabe, 2009; Pittman, 2012). Few have addressed microaggression in the classroom (Hardwood et al., 2012). The college campus was the focal point of where the study took place. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to document African American students' experiences of racial microaggression at a rural

four-year PWI in the Midwest, and the various spaces in which they occur. Any member of an ethnic minority group can experience racial microaggression, but this study is specifically focused on undergraduate and graduate African American students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to meet the objectives of the study:

1. How do African American students at a PWI in the rural Midwest experience racial microaggression on campus?

2. How do African American students at a PWI respond to racial microaggression on campus?

3. What do African American students at a PWI think can be done to improve the racial microaggression climate on campus?

Significance of the Study

The challenges facing African American students on a college campus is not new. Historically, students of color face challenges that their White counterparts may not have to endure (Rivera & Lonis-Shumae, 2014). Furthermore, higher education institutions have jumped on the diversity bandwagon in response to the unprecedented diversity among its students. More recently, there has been a movement towards inclusive excellence (Freytag, 2008; Williams, 2007) which at its core "is the recognition that a community or institution's success is dependent on how well it values, engages and includes the rich diversity of students, staff, faculty, administrators, and alumni constituents" (University of Denver, 2016, p. 1). However, students of color still continue to feel the impact of the undercurrent historical social inequities in the form of more

subtle and sometimes not so subtle microaggressive acts. Often these occur in the very classroom in which learning is supposed to be essential (Rooks, 2014; Westerholm, 2013). Yet, if institutions are to achieve their goals of inclusive excellence, all stakeholders must be educated about inclusion, and acknowledge the obvious problem, a natural first step is to document the experiences of those who have fallen victim to microaggression.

Gathering students experiences with microaggression in the classroom could help administration look at diversity not only at a campus but also in the classroom (Watt, 2007). Microaggression may be studied more intensely to identify the reason of low retention rates in the African American community. Learning environments should be a safe place where faculty is able to help students explore areas outside their comfort zone. Students can actually learn the material rather than focus their attention on what stereotypes their peers have placed on them (Kohl, 2002). This study could bring attention to the administration in higher education to recognize issues and to work towards retaining African American students that attend a PWI. In addition, the study was conducted through qualitative research in order to understand how microaggression in a classroom can affect one's ability to achieve academic goals. Gathering the perceptions of African American students could help identify problems and benefit the lives of students.

Limitations of the Study

All research studies are subject to some limitations that impact the validity of the findings. A number of limitations have been identified in this study. The first limitation would include researcher bias. The findings throughout the research may be inferred

based on my own personal experiences as an African American female attending a PWI (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I have attended the institution since I was a freshman. I have experienced some uncomfortable moments of microaggression by both White faculty and White students. Due to the multitude of my own experiences, my personal experience at a PWI may be considered a limitation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To minimize this limitation, I tried to stay on target with the research questions and asked follow-up questions for students to elaborate on their shared experiences (Dilley, 2000). A second limitation is that the findings may not be transferable to the entire population of African American students. Participants were selected based on the experiences they endured at the selected institution, and therefore, transferability may only be appropriate at a similar institution with similar demography.

Definition of Terms

It is appropriate that the important terms have been identified to better understand how they are being used throughout the research. These are listed below.

African American. Descendants from Africa that currently are residents of the United States (Dictionary of American history, 2017).

Black. Throughout this study Black and African American will be used interchangeably.

Classroom climate. Classroom climate are areas involving faculty and students. The classroom climate entails many things such as the learning outcomes, teaching techniques, programs, classroom discussions (Martinez-Aleman & Renn, 2002).

Faculty. Faculty is an employee of the University that performs many duties on campus. In particular faculty will be referred to as facilitating and teaching classes on a college level (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995).

Microaggression. This refers to "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color" (Sue et al, 2007, p. 271).

Summary

Microaggression is identified as a hidden issue that lingers silently on college campuses across the United States that can negatively impact students of minority groups. Acknowledging that there is an issue could initiate awareness within higher education. In addition, bringing light upon microaggression could possibly assist in the future towards improving campus diversity classes. The diversity training could help institutions become effective through the true definition of culture inclusion. Chapter two presents a detailed review of the literature on microaggression and the African American experience, as well as the theoretical frameworks which guided the study. Chapter three is the method that was used to develop a solid plan according to how this research will be conducted. The results of the analyses are presented in chapter four, and chapter five concludes this document, with implications, recommendations and a discussion.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This study sought to gain insight into how African American students at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) experience microaggression on a campus. An in-depth review of the literature was conducted on the topic. This chapter presents the result of this review, which includes the historical context and some of the most recent discourse.

The Educational Knowledge of W.E.B Du Bois

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line" (Du Bois, 1968, p. 21). These words uttered by W.E.B. Du Bois in his ground breaking book *Souls of Black Folks* at the turn of the 20th century symbolized an issue that continues to plague the United States social cultural landscape today. Du Bois, an African American activist, powerfully acknowledged the glaring disparities in education between Blacks and Whites. Born February 23, 1868 in Barrington, Massachusetts, and three years after the end of the Civil War (Lewis, 1993), Du Bois was the most notable sociologist of his time. Du Bois attended Fisk University, a historically Black college, during his undergraduate career, where he discovered the invisible line of educational inequality. Fisk administered an annual English examination to students that no one passed, except for the only White student attending the university (Du Bois, 1968). The up and coming activist was able to read through the lines of color.

Du Bois' educational challenge brought about by the color of his skin did not end at Fisk. While pursuing his doctoral degree at Harvard University, the students did not speak to, interact with, or indulge Du Bois, the only Black student in the class (Du Bois,

1968). He opted not to reside in the dorms; instead, he made arrangements to live with a Black homeowner, a few blocks away from the university (Du Bois, 1968). Fisk University had prepared him for the racial discrimination that he encountered at Harvard.

Under the segregationist ideology of the 1930's that was especially widespread in the South, many perceived that African Americans were backwards and incapable of achieving intellectually (Aldridge, 1999). However, Du Bois had another vision for African Americans. He believed that in the U.S. "we did not decide our birth, wealth, or privilege, but our country is set up based on a strategic system to attempt to keep certain individuals oppressed" (Du Bois, 1968, p. 166). He actively advocated a new educational philosophy that involved culture, social approaches, economics, and politics for African Americans (Rabaka, 2003). More importantly, W.E.B. Du Bois wanted education to be equally taught in every classroom to help create an equal opportunity for everyone (Aldridge, 1999). However, in 2016, over 50 years after the civil rights movement, racial inequity continues to adorn our classrooms across the educational landscape (Charles, Roscigno, Torres, 2007; Condron, Topre, Steidl, & Freeman, 2013).

Racism Within the U.S. Educational System

Racism in the United States has left a mark on all its institutions. It began with African American slaves who expressed interest to read and write, yet their slave masters punished them. Slaves were given certain duties, but they were not allowed to exercise the right of an education (Christie, 2010). When slavery was officially abolished, the main principle was the need to educate Blacks to defend themselves living free within the United States and to show equality for every man regardless of skin color (Morgan, 1995). Unfortunately, not everyone agreed with the signing of the Emancipation

Proclamation; Morgan (1995) described the purpose of the White hate group, the Ku Klux Klan, was to scare African Americans from voting, owning property, and attending school. The beatings and murderous acts towards Blacks were warnings to encourage them to stay away from improving in White society. During segregation Black and White schools were not funded equally. Black schools were overcrowded, underfunded, and their facilities were insufficient (Levine & Levine, 2014).

There was a common saying throughout the years of Jim Crow: "When you are white, you are right; when you are Black, stand back" (Stokes, Wolfe, & Viola, 2008, p. 24). This saying stemmed from racist beliefs. According to Gill (1926), racism is a behavior that has been conditioned, implanted, and embedded within our laws. The United States history includes racism and the neglect of African Americans (Smith, 2011), but others hold on to the belief that slavery and segregation is over and African Americans just need to get over it (Smith, 2013).

Today, public schools in predominantly African American populated areas are still being affected by the lack of funding provided by the government (Jackson & Howard, 2014). The value of education in America is very important and is expected when applying for jobs and other opportunities that require a strong educational background. However, African Americans that take up residence in poverty-stricken areas may not have access to a strong academic foundation (Thompson, 2003). Though there has been an increase of Blacks attending PWIs, the graduation rate is only 2.4% (Levine & Levine, 2014); in addition, they are lagging in attendance because of the lack of support they receive (Johnson-Bailey, Ray, & Lasker-Scott, 2014).

Racial Microaggression: The New Face of Racism

Although slavery was abolished in the United States in 1865 (Curseen, 2013), African Americans continue to be the target of discrimination, hate crime, and racial harassment (Sue, 2003; Sue 2010). In the workplace and on college campuses, many experience the more subtle microaggression on a daily basis (Eligon & Pérez-Peña, 2015; Watanabe & Song, 2015). According to Sue (2010) microaggressions can be unintentional or intentional brief verbal messages that degrade individuals that are considered minorities. Stereotypes play a major role in microaggression and can place a strain on students whether it is a positive or negative experience (Smith, 2013). Sue (2010) described three types of microaggression: microassaults, microinsult, and microinvalidation.

Microassaults. Microassaults can be avoidance behaviors, purposeful discriminatory actions, or deliberate biased attitudes towards persons of color (Sue, 2010). Frequently nonverbal manifestation of microassault is done consciously. This type of racial tension could possibly cause a strain in the learning atmosphere for non-white students. In the classroom, regardless of the teaching method, some African American students may feel disconnected from the learning environment. This often results in students subconsciously, or even consciously migrating to other students of their own ethnicity in the classroom and thus forming a segregated classroom (Sue, et al 2008). The classroom may seem intimidating for students of color particularly if they are underrepresented when asked to break off into discussion or assignment groups (Smith & Hawkins, 2011).

Microinsults. Microinsults are communications that express rudeness, insensitivity, and humiliation of a person's racial heritage (Sue, 2010). This type of microaggression typically occurs unconsciously by the offender. A study by Hardwood et al., (2012) reported a racial profiling incident in which a White female student referred to a Hispanic student laughingly as "tacos". The victim of the microinsult realized that the girl was ignorant of how this negatively impacted and offended the Hispanic student. Microinsult can create a barrier among students, but educating them to avoid inappropriate conversations should be priority. Institutions should invest more time and attention in educating majority class students in racial sensitivity (Crandall & Garcia, 2016). Stephens, Hernandez, Roman, Graham, and Scholz (2008) suggest that universities may struggle with altering established norms or prejudices in their campus community and moving everyone toward civic and societal engagement. Consequently, the authors recommended that African Americans be allowed greater opportunities for creativity, for universities to work toward forming appreciation for diversity and building connectedness among various ethnicities, and creating a friendly atmosphere on their campuses.

Microinvalidations. Microinvalidations are disturbing symbols or messages directed toward minorities (Sue, 2010). These also contribute toward an unpleasant and negative atmosphere on campuses. Hardwood et al., (2012) discovered four themes of microaggression on college campuses. One of the four themes identified was racial slurs written in public places. An African American student experienced seeing the [N-word] on the blackboard. This greatly disturbed the student. Microinvalidations like this could negatively affect minority students resulting in them being distracted from their studies,

feeling unwelcome, angry, hurt, isolated, and defensive. African American students feel uncomfortable speaking to others whom they believe cannot understand or who do not genuinely care for them. Microaggressions directed toward minority students trigger recall of negative experiences from their past. Such students have greater difficulty retaining information in the classroom when they are caused to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome (Rivera & Lonis-Shumae, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

Primarily a critical theory perspective guided this study. The foundation of various theories has derived from the critical theory. This theory seeks to expose imbalances of power and influence and recognizes the oppressed in society. Nevertheless it is important to understand that the critical race theory helps create discernments on examining how we view individuals and groups and the imbalance of power and influences among races (Fuhrman, 1978). Muted group theory was also applied to help explain how the voices of African Americans are often silenced on College campuses.

Critical Race Theory.

Critical race theory (CRT) provides insights into how elements of education have dominate and subordinate standings based on race on college campuses in and out of the classroom (Solorzano, Ceja, &Yosso, 2000). CRT consists of five primary elements: 1. centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, 2. challenge to dominant ideology, 3. commitment to social justice, 4. centrality of experiential knowledge, and 5. transdisciplinary perspective. CRT exposes both microaggressions and their origins. Victims of racism have a voice when microaggressions are named and investigated. In addition, the victims realize they are not alone and are empowered by sharing and exchanging stories of microaggression with

others who have been victimized. CRT enables this study to address microaggressions in and out of the classroom through the experiences of African American students.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) describe CRT as a movement, made up of activists and scholars, to better understand the correlation of race, power, and racism. CRT identifies individuals that have the capabilities to grow and obtain knowledge, but often feel that their history and culture are undervalued in an educational setting (Bernal, 2002). It is equally important to fathom that America was built on the backs of slaves in its early history. Due to oppressive laws and regulations implemented throughout history, a sense of white superiority is ingrained within the education system (Jones, 1986). Although this is a major setback for many in the Black community, there are numerous graduates that have completed their degree requirements from PWIs (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

W.E.B. Dubois experienced microaggression in the classroom because he looked different during the late1800's and early 1900's, a time when the custom in this country was for Blacks to be excluded from education (Dubois, 1968). Eggleston and Miranda (2009) discovered academia can have harmful effects on students who experience racism. In addition, students of color reported feeling lack of motivation to proceed in college due to the low support provided by faculty and staff. Inequality in college is still a present issue that is affecting the African American race. Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) made a notable mention that racism still exists. Critical race theory also challenges laws created by people of the dominant race to oppress and suppress African Americans (Parker, 2003). Race is a huge controversial topic especially within education. Our educational system, as it currently exist, is guided by assumption, norms, and established

practices defined by the White majority and benefits this majority class more than others (Vargas, 2003).

  Muted-group theory. Muted-group theory was developed by anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener to understand the experiences of the lives of women and African American men within society and how their voices are silenced or ignored (Orbe, 1998). The theory exposes how the voices of minorities in society go unheard, even when faced with insurmountable crises and how the predominately White race defines the messages that are heard. Orbe (1998) determined that a member of a muted group communicates with the dominant culture through preferred outcome, or goal for the interaction. He found three general goals: 1. assimilation, blending in with the dominant group; 2. separation, minimizing any contact with the dominant group; and 3. accommodation, trying to persuade the dominant culture to "change the rules so that they incorporate the life experiences" of muted groups. The theory suggests that the best choice depends on the particular circumstances of the co-culture. If individuals of the lesser race, culture, or gender make a statement, the dominant group may disrespect it. The people belonging to the dominant group disparage opinions and verbal communication towards the inferior race in order to retain its dominance (Kramarae, 2005). The impact the muted group has on African American students' educational experiences creates different outcomes for each individual. For example, Orbe (1998) stated "the process forces other persons who are not dominant-group members to function within a communication system that is not necessarily representation of their experiences" (p. 21).

African American students can be affected by other races within their classroom especially when they are placed in a group setting. The term a "muted black hole" refers to an African American being placed into someone else's universe (Kramarae, 2005). This can be seen at many universities; one recently published article in the media was Missouri University. Students were protesting against racial discrimination they experienced by faculty and students of the dominant race. The students were protesting for more faculty of color to help improve cultural inclusion on` campus. While they were protesting White students told them to "get over it" and to "move on". This would represent muted-group theory, which can be constructed within a PWI (Femer & Wing, 2015). Instead of helping the non-dominant group by standing up with them or looking at the series of events from their point of view, they were criticized by their own peers of a different race.

Reviewing the behavior of African American students that are affected by silence within a classroom setting because they feel as if their opinion will not be valued is an issue within higher education (Orbe, 1998). The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported that although there has been an increase in students of color who are attending college many of them are not completing due to feeling disconnected in the classroom. African Americans are more open when their faculty are of the same race or are able to actually take the time and embrace their students (McCabe, 2009). Students are experiencing these uncertainties of higher education on many campuses across the United States.

Summary of the Literature Review

Microaggression is a threat towards diversity and inclusion within the classroom. A student does not graduate because the campus is diverse; a student graduates because of the influences on a college campus. The concepts and theories provided within the literature review provide strong basis through the framework of critical race theory and muted-group theory for investigating microaggression. Microaggression is a new form of racism that has historically progressed over time. Nevertheless, implementing cultural inclusion courses that are taken seriously and providing more faculty of color available to students will not only provide a higher retention rate, but will also increase graduation rates.

CHAPTER III

Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study was to recognize students that experience microaggression in higher education. The objective was to explore identifying and exposing issues of microaggression that occurred within the university environment and classroom. The chapter presents a detailed description of the methodology of the study.

Design of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore microaggression within the university environment. Qualitative methodology was chosen over quantitative methodology because qualitative research allows for the collection of rich data that captures the emotions and illustrates the personal impact of microaggression on participants (Silverman, 2016). Quantitative research is an emotionless methodology in which researchers separate themselves from being a part of the study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). This researcher is an African American who has been affected by microaggression in higher education and shares the emotional and personal insight of those participating in the study.

Qualitative research has several advantages such as providing detailed descriptions, utilizing new practices that can be gained from research descriptions, and the opportunity to gather interest in the findings (Silverman, 2016). The researcher recorded the experiences of students to obtain information. The qualitative methodology was used to best answer the research questions, because a clearer understanding of the negative impact that microaggression has on African American students could be obtained from participants' personal experiences and narrative (Fraenkel, Wallen, &

Hyun, 2015). There are many approaches within the qualitative field of research.

However, to better explore this specific topic the narrative approach was used to study

the stories of students who had encounters with microaggression (Polkinghorne, 2007).

According to Josselson (2006), narrative research "strives to preserve the complexity of

what it means to be human and to locate its observation of people and phenomena in

society, history, and time" (p. 4). The narrative approach was selected to employ

participants' own voices in comprehending the experiences of minorities who have felt

excluded or disconnected from classes due to their skin color. Sandelowski (1991)

emphasized that people's experiences provide insight to how they are socially

constructed and context driven with this "special access to the human experience of time,

order and change, and it obligates to listen to the human impulse to tell tales" (p.165).

The narrative methodology was used to better understand the stories of African American

students while attending a PWI. The researcher used an open-ended question approach to

allow the participants to share their experiences in detail.

Participants

Participants were six African American traditional senior undergraduate students

and graduate students from the institution of interest. The participants included four

females and two males all ranging between the ages of 18-24. A purposeful sample was

selected based on students' personal experiences with racial microaggression (Maxwell,

1996). The researcher had prior knowledge of students that experienced racial

microaggression while being on campus. She had met them previously at campus events

and in classrooms where they expressed that they had been impacted by various types of

microaggression. Participants were contacted via email with closed-ended questions of

demographics and questions of their experiences, while being enrolled at a predominately White institution (PWI). After the participants submitted the email, an interview was scheduled to gain greater detail and insight of their experiences. Network approach was used to identify willing participants who knew others that had similar experiences (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). The networking approach helped the researcher gain more participants and rich data of experiences that related to the topic of microaggression.

Research Site

The study was conducted at a rural, Midwestern four-year public state university in fall 2016. At the time of data collection, the student enrollment was about 8,000 students. Out of these 16.9% were African American and 69.0% were White. In addition, 3.9% of faculty were African American and 82.4% were White (EIU, 2015). The university is located within a small town surrounded by farmlands. This location was chosen for convenience since the researcher was a student at the institution with access to the target population.

Instrument

The instrument for data collection involved the researcher conducting interviews using open-ended questions. Treatment of data and data analysis were also described.

Researcher. My interest in this specific research topic developed from my personal experiences as an African American female. I went to a predominately White Catholic elementary school. I subsequently attended a high school where the majority of students were African American. I received a bachelor's degree in kinesiology exercise science at a PWI. I experienced microaggression as a student in and out of the classroom.

There were awkward moments in class where the faculty allowed students to create their own groups for a research assignment. I would sometimes find myself and other African Americans being the odd ball out and having to form our own group. At other times, I would ask questions regarding the homework or study material and my professors would not invest the time to assist me with my concerns. The White students in the class would tell me how the professor was extremely helpful, but the limited information my professor provided me was usually to simply read the book or pay more attention in class. For example, it was second semester, freshmen year, and I had a really tough biology class. I studied all the time for this particular class striving to earn a good grade. I made note cards and even had study partners to help me. I realized that I was still not achieving academically. I went to my professor for extra help and he told me to just read the book. I was baffled due to the fact that I was using information from the book to study for prior tests. I felt socially and mentally incapable. I viewed myself as intellectually inferior from my White peers after this experience, even though we all attended to the institution to obtain an education. My confidence diminished because I had to work seemingly twice as hard in order to succeed. Eddy and Hogan (2014) found that people learn differently based on their social construction and ethnicity, suggesting that faculty use a variety of methods for teaching and learning in order to maximize learning for all students. I believe if my professor had done this I could have been successful in his course. Some White faculty may not have been aware of their discriminatory treatment toward students of color (Feagin, 1996). This could create frustration among minority students, as it did for me. I was not able to relate to my professors and they appeared to have little interest in helping me achieve.

Open-ended questions. Prior to being interviewed, participants were provided with a series of open-ended questions intended to elicit detailed descriptions of their experiences with microaggression across the college environment (see Appendix A). Participants' responses to these questions were used to develop additional questions to extract deeper insights from their stories.

Semi-structured interviews. In order to fulfill the need to conduct successful interviews, the researcher utilized a semi-structured approach. Semi-structured interviews are discussions that are lead by the researcher, wherein the participant is aware of the topic (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). The conversations are not solely guided on questions. "The researcher was able to gain insight within human beings understand and enact their lives through stories" (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 163). Prior to conducting the interview, email notices were sent to selected candidates requesting demographic information and summaries of their experiences with microaggression. Closed-ended questions were used for collecting demographic data. All other questions were open-ended. Once participants returned this information via email, interviews were scheduled. Interviews lasted between 20-30 minutes. Participants' names were not disclosed to insure confidentiality. Pseudonyms replace their names in this study. By asking open-ended questions participants' perceptions were given, in a manner that allowed elaborate on experiences in detail during the interview. Some questions were modified for clarification.

Data Collection

Data was collected through one-on-one interviews. These interviews occurred in private areas, such as dorm rooms and off-campus living quarters, free from distractions. Private areas were selected based on the comfort of the participants. Participants were

encouraged to share all related experiences of microaggression that occurred while being enrolled at a PWI. Prior to data collected from the one-on-one interviews, the researcher collected books, empirical reports, scholarly peer-reviewed articles, and newspaper articles of current events related to microaggression.

Data Analysis

The researcher listened to each audio recording of the entire interview. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher then submitted to the participants for member checking. A recognizable trend of microaggression arose from these conversations. According to Saldaña (2013), data analysis is "appropriate for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story which is justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing" (p. 132) The process involved a diversity of methods, and was particularly suited for inquiries about socio-cultural issues. Qualitative analysis was applied to make some type of sense out of each data collection, to look for patterns and relationships both within a collection, and also across collections, and too make general discoveries about microaggression.

Treatment of the Data

Participant produced data were appropriately handled as per IRB protocol to ensure confidentiality. Audio recordings were reviewed only by the primary researcher. Microsoft office products like excel and word were utilized within this study to organize data, categorize trends, and create tables. The data obtained was kept in a password-protected flash drive. All data was used only for the purpose of this study. All information collected will be deleted within three years after completion of this study.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the culture of racial microaggression at a predominantly White college campus through the lens of African American students. More specifically, the researcher wanted to answer the following questions: How do African American students at a Public White Institution (PWI) in the rural Midwest experience microaggression on a college campus? How do African American students at a PWI respond to microaggression on a college campus? What do African American students at a PWI think can be done to improve the microaggression climate in their classrooms? As previously discussed there are three types of microaggression: microinsult, microassault, and microinvalidation. During analysis, participants' experiences were organized by these three types, as well as the spaces in which they occurred. This chapter presents findings from six participants that voluntarily shared their experiences of microaggression while attending a PWI.

Participants' Profiles

Six students who were enrolled at the institution at the time of data collection, and who identified as African American served as informants in this study. Two were male, four were female. Participants were encouraged to describe their experiences honestly, to express how they felt, and to share how they believed the issue can be addressed.

Katy. Katy is a 21-year-old African American female who was a senior at the time of data collection. She majored in marketing, and is from Gurnee, Illinois.

Darnell. Darnell is a 24-year-old African American female who is a graduate student at the time of data collection; Darnell is studying college student affairs. She is from the South Side of Chicago.

Simone. Simone, a Sociology major, is an 18-year-old African American female who was a sophomore at the time of the data collection. Simone is currently. Simone is from the south side of Chicago.

KM. KM is a 24-year-old African American graduate student at the time of the data collection, KM is studying counseling within the department of Counseling and Student development. KM is from Peoria, Illinois.

Nick. Nick is a 24-year-old African American male graduate student at the time of data collection; Nick is studying Kinesiology with a concentration of exercise science. Nick is from

Chad. Chad is a 23-year-old African American male graduate student at the time of data collection; Chad is studying in the college of Communications.

African American Students' Experiences of Microaggression

Thematic analyses of participants' narratives, revealed that African American students at the institution of interest are victims of various types of microaggressions from their professors, peers, staff, and law enforcement officers. Furthermore, these occur across different campus spaces, in the classroom, at campus events, in campus offices located, and during encounters with campus police. However, the classroom emerged as the most common space where individuals experience microaggression as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Occurrences of Microassault, Microinsult, and Microinvalidation Among Six Students of Color at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest

Spaces of Microaggression	Number of Occurrences
Microassault	
Classroom	6
Campus Police	1
Campus event	3
Campus Office	2
Total	12
Microinsult	
Classroom	10
Campus events	2
Total	12
Microinvalidation	
Classrooms	18
Campus Police	3
Campus events	4
Campus office	4
Total	29

Students' Experiences of and Response to Microinvalidations

Among the three types of microaggressions, African American students at the institution studied, described experiences of microinvalidations at a rate two times more frequent than the others. These occurred overwhelmingly in the classroom. African American students are gaining access to higher education, but it may have become suppressed due to the spaces of microinvalidations. African American students that were placed in the microinvalidation group had lower confidence in class than their peers. For example, Darnell described the hardship of just being Black, and being made to feel that she and her entire race were being dealt "the short end of the stick." She explained

> I think they [members of the majority group] have very low expectations of us so they just generalize us…I will just say Black in general, with the whole entire race I feel like we definitely have the short end of the stick and we have to deal with these adversities.

Unfortunately, Darnell like many other African American students, sometimes perceive that their White instructors do not have the same expectations of their Black students as they do of their White or even Asian students. This could result in lowered academic performance as students then live up to those expectations in a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. Furthermore, individuals that do not identify as an ethnic minority may associate Black students with difficulty of learning, thus negatively impacting their higher education experience. Darnell's white professor assumed that she needed extra assistance with her education. Darnell used the idiom "the short hand of the stick" is what to describe the hardship of being black at a PWI.

Higher education provides opportunities to interact with experts, which students deem as useful information. Students look for their professors to prep them towards their future endeavors. Simone, a freshmen student, was influenced by the credibility and the knowledge her professor shared. Little did Simone know, prior to taking classes, her professor would mock her culture and make jokes about her race. Her professor would make comments such as no one wants to be a "Laquita", referencing a style of singing. The racist jokes were a clear illustration of a microinsult. The insensitivity from her professor created a hostile environment for the only Black student in the class. The talented singer Simone, a music major, was impacted by negative comments that were made while in her music class.

But when he [My White professor] first said that it kind of broke me down it was like, I won't make it because I'm not made to specifically sing classical music…I feel like they want to keep them [white students] in there so. They are going to help them [the white students] to progress and do better. I was the only black student.

Simone described that none of her White peers expressed signs of discouragement from the professor, but the White students explained how they are being supported, "They [White students] said we can't read music and we [White students] really do not like singing these types of songs". Although they did not like the music, Simone felt that her professor worked with them in areas they lacked so they can succeed. Simone did not receive that same treatment. Instead she was left feeling lost and frustrated in the classroom. "As time went on, he [My White professor] would continue to make rude comments". Simone was placed in a situation where she was required to learn in a classroom full of microaggression comments towards her culture.

Though most reports of microinvalidations occurred in the classroom, a few occurred during students' encounter with on-campus police. Chad recounted being racially profiled.

As I rode by [on my bike] I looked behind me and noticed that they [campus police] were riding behind me… one of the officers said, 'we smelled marijuana when you rode pass [us]'. I denied it and told them, 'It couldn't be me, I am just coming from another job. I have witnesses that were with me the entire time'.

For Chad, a simple act as riding his bike through campus made him a racial target of campus police. Being all too familiar with how some seemingly routine encounters

between Black males and law enforcement, Chad's conditioned response was fear. He associated the simple act of an encounter with a police officer with fearing for his life.

> I felt very uncomfortable. [I was] pretty scared because it was out of nowhere. It was a very unexpected situation. I knew I didn't do anything wrong so it was a little bit scary. They just wanted to harass me in my opinion....
>
> And I thought that they may have thought it was funny to mess with the black boy riding on the bike. So my biggest thing that I do is always take that and understand that I am at the mercy of that officer. That officer can take my life and probably get away with it.

Campus wide crime advisories are a way to keep students and faculty aware of dangerous suspects in the area. There are benefits to campus advisories, but it can also be a form of microinvalidations. KM described the differences between Black and White suspects when a crime advisory is sent campus wide by both email and text message.

> I got [a crime advisory] one about a White guy earlier this week. It was a lengthy description of blonde hair shaggy, blue eye, with a tattoo on his back, how tall he was six something, [his] build and everything, but when I get one about a black suspect African American with a hood, male all the time. So I mean that could be anybody. You know that could be anybody on campus.

The message was sent as a way to help prevent further crimes. However, the way the message was presented made every Black male on campus a suspect. The crime advisory generalized one group of individuals, making false judgment that African American males can be seen as criminals, which makes the campus community view African American males that wear hoodies in a negative way. Microinvalidations are the feelings

of pessimism a student feels when he/she are in the classroom, attending a campus event, or coming to a campus where every Black man is questioned.

Students' Experiences of and Response to Microassault

African American students at the institution studied, described several experiences of microassault which occurred across four different spaces. The classroom appears to be an important space where students encounter experiences of microassault. This assault often came from those in the position of power, probably conducted in a misguided attempt to motivate. For example, Simone shared that her professor remarked that she "would never make it anywhere in life" if she does not sing classical music. This microassault can be hurtful, and in this case could have really shot down the dreams of someone aspiring to have a career in a highly competitive field. Simone shared, "When he [the instructor] first said that to me it broke me down…" For Katy, one of her experiences of microassault came when her professor effectively muted her participation in class. She explained, "When I raised my hand [my professor] would never call on me." Katy expressed feeling "belittled… frustrated… irritated". Katy wanted to contribute to the classroom, but her professor prevented her by not calling on her when she raised her hand. This is a form of microassault to an extent of neglect in the classroom.

Nick, a graduate student, was also the victim of microassault. One incident occurred in the classroom and came from his White peers regarding a controversial topic that was trending on social media.

Kalin Kapernick [National Football player] decided not to stand up during the national anthem and put his hand over his heart. He decided to kneel, just as a sign of justice for black lives matter. And some people were saying like they hope

he never scores another touchdown in his life and how are you going take a stance

for black lives matter and you're half White?

It was evident that this left a mark on Nick. He felt that a member of his racial group was being attacked. Further, his peers appeared unaware or oblivious to how their statements might be received by their Black peers. As inappropriate as the conversation was the professor failed to intervene. Though the topic being brought up was not intentional, the comments were racist. The students who engaged in the conversation and contributed to the assaults showed a lack of concern about how their statements may impact their Black peers in the class. When students do not feel safe in their learning environment, their learning is impeded.

Students' Experiences of and Response to Microinsults

Microinsults are rude remarks that can degrade students of color, international students, women, etc. Insults are unnecessary and distasteful comments. African Americans have long been the object of racist jokes, for the entertainment of those from the majority group. When it occurs in the classroom, it creates an environment that is not conducive to learning. For Simone, one microinsult incident that stood out occurred during her freshman year, contributing to a rough transition. One of her professors made unnecessary comments which insulted her talents and her culture.

My professor would make racist jokes like, we don't want to articulate our words

in a Black way, like in a slang way. He would make jokes like that and everybody

would laugh. My professor also mentioned we don't want to be like the Laquitas

in life.

The "Laquitas" reference was not only inappropriate, but it was not a positive classroom environment. This professor created jokes directed at the only Black student in the classroom. This type of teaching can be offensive and unfair in the educational setting. When students do not feel supported or respected in the classroom, learning can be obstructed.

Katy was also disregarded when she went to her professor's office hours for additional help to prep for a test,

> So the few times I did go to his [my professor's] office for an upcoming exam he
> was just like you should already know this information. I don't know why you are
> asking questions about it [the test] you should already know. This is prior
> knowledge.

Katy was in need of assistance from her professor before taking a testing. Instead, this professor made a rude comment that was not beneficial towards her. Through microinvalidations Katy felt "frustration and irritation".

African American students are often perceived as academically under-prepared for college. This could lead instructors to assume that their African American students require extra assistance that they are sometimes unwilling to provide. Darnell, a graduate student shared that her professor would refer to her educational background as needing extra help. This led her to feel offended and annoyed.

> It's really offending me that you think that I need this extra assistance, not that
> there's nothing wrong with extra assistance because a lot of us Black kids don't
> get proper education when we come to college, but I'm good like don't keep

assuming negative things about me or my characteristics because of the color of

my skin. It's just very annoying.

Darnell's professor thought of her in a stereotypical way. She assumed that because

Darnell is Black she automatically had some sort of educational disability. Darnell had to

repeatedly inform her graduate professor that she did not have bad educational

experiences. Her White professor prejudged her skills based off the color of her skin.

Student Recommendations to End Microaggression

One of the objectives of the study was to elicit from the students who have

experienced microaggressions, the ways they thought that the issue could be combated.

They were asked to provide solutions they thought worked best. After the participants

expressed their experiences they also articulated preventative ways to avoid

microaggression. Darnell is in advocate for treating everyone fairly.

I think we have to do what we can to empower us as black people. We have to

empower each other in the meantime. It would be nice if white people could get

on board, we get those that are [on board].

Darnell mentioned "Empowerment" as a way to encourage young African American

students when they endure microaggression from others. Darnell also mentioned being

an, "advocate for everyone being treated fairly, everyone treated equally and just don't

show special treatment towards anyone regardless of their skin color." Darnell would

rather be treated equally, and not because of her race. Katy explained that she would also

be an advocate for equality in the classroom. She suggested that her professor change his

views towards African Americans, "But you have to treat all of your students the same

way regardless of what struggles they may have, regardless of what they understand and

don't understand. Your job is to help us understand." Katy is looking for her professor to assist her and not neglect her when she needs further understanding.

Chad expressed his way of dealing with microaggression has helped him to develop a stronger mindset. Chad's solution is, "Fighting against these systems made me a better person as opposed to being weaker." Chad believes that fighting the system with each encounter will help pave the way for the future. In the mean time he wants to better others by educating them on ways to mend this problem. Simone grew stronger after her experiences with microaggression.

> In the beginning the comments that they made hurt me, but nothing will ever take
>
> me to a place where I just don't want to sing anymore unless I can't sing
>
> anymore. So it took me to place where it actually made me a little stronger.

In the unfortunate situation, Simone was placed in she was able to cultivate what she went through and grow. Dropping out was probably an option for Simone, but she decided to let nothing stop her from getting her education. She explained, "In a learning process you're supposed to teach and not criticize." Harsh criticism could hurt students mentally and negatively impact them physically. Harsh criticism diminishes students' self-esteem. A study by the University of Michigan found that 80% of students reported that their level of self esteem affected their class performance and grades (Dittman, 2002). In another study at Kings College students reported that low self-esteem negatively impacted their health (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Professors should be aware of the difference between constructive feedback and feedback that could possibly hurt student's confidence.

KM has learned over her time dealing with microaggression to teach people using a constructive insight. She has tried other notions, but she has found a method that worked for her, "If I just fight insults with insults then you're not [going to] learning anything, so just trying to provide factual information in a more positive manner." KM would rather talk to people that influence microaggression with intellect rather than an argumentative conversation. KM also encouraged a day where the community and the students would be able to indulge in a day of difference through volunteering, "It needs to be something inclusive. We all come together and go somewhere and clean something up for the community" through volunteering towards making an impact could influence other to work together and share both commonalities and differences.

Summary

The research conducted in this study focused on African American experiences of microaggression on a PWI. Chapter 4 is a summary of the results from the semi-formal interview sessions. After analyzing the data through coding, fifty-two spaces on the study of college campus were discovered. This indicates that frequent microaggression actions occur on a college campus. The findings provided data relatable to the topic which indicated that all students in the study expressed some form of microaggression. The participants had expressed feelings of being frustrated, offended, and insulted from words and actions taken by students, professors, and administrators. Whether it was intentional or unintentional students experienced each form of microaggression addressed in this study: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation.

The impact of microaggression can be degrading to people of color. One study by Constantine and Sue (2007) reported that racial issues are not viewed as important

enough to discuss. African American students want their voice to be heard along with solutions. Many White people are unaware of their privilege, which can cause damaging effects on African Americans (Constantine & Sue, 2007). Unintentional microaggression inflicted by White faculty, students, and staff, toward the African American participants resulted in low self-esteem, feelings of being disrespected, shock, surprise, anger, and insulted. This also resulted in them sometimes becoming too distracted by the microaggressions to focus on their course performance. The first step to eliminating microaggression is to address it. Franklin (2007) found that after victims of microaggression determine whether the action was intentional or unintentional, they can address it. However, if they do address unintentional microaggression, they could be labeled as "overly sensitive" (Franklin, 2007).

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore microaggression within the university environment at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) through the lens of African American college students. The research questions were designed to understand microaggression through experiences shared on campus, along with asking students recommendations to eliminate microaggression. The researcher investigated students' experiences dealing with discrimination throughout their college career. This chapter discusses the findings from the qualitative research, which used narrative to identify themes and concepts arising from data produced through interviews. Discussion, recommendations, limitations and suggestions for further explorations were provided.

Discussion

A few important findings emerged which gave the researcher insight into African American students' experiences of microaggression. These findings were framed by the heavy descriptive and theory-driven approach used for data analysis. The following are some important findings that emerged: African American students at a PWI are likely to be victims of microaggression in one of its three forms; African American students at a PWI encounter microaggression in multiple spaces including the classroom, campus offices, while interacting with on-campus law enforcement, and on-campus events; and African American students also expressed ways their experiences could have been handled differently. Unfortunately, institutions are not living up to the expectations of cultural inclusion, which is needed to ensure success in academia and engaging opportunities for diverse student populations, whether it be microinsults,

microinvalidations, and microassaults, varied from White teachers, White administrators, White law-enforcement officers, and White students. These findings were similar to those reported by Eligon and Pérez-Peña (2015) and Watanabe and Song (2015) stating that African Americans experience microaggression on a daily basis in the workplace and on college campuses.

Research Questions #1. How do African American students at a PWI experience microaggression in their classroom? Sue et al. (2007) described racial microaggression as a "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (p. 271). All participants in the current study were victims of microaggression. They were affected by microaggression in their classrooms, in campus administration offices, in encounters with the campus police department, and on-campus events. This was comparable to Eggleston and Marranda's (2009) findings where microaggression in the classroom had produced harmful effects on African American students, such as lack of motivation and feelings of inadequate support.

Four out of the six participants identified college professors as the perpetrators. This is perhaps the most surprising finding. Some might assume that the educated instructor has some degree of cultural competence. However, this is not necessarily true. This is particularly troubling because of the significant role that faculty play in student achievement. This supports the need for a clearer understanding from faculty reported by McCabe (2009), who found that African Americans are more open when their faculty are of the same race or are able to actually take the time and embrace their students.

Microaggressions are often looked upon as indicating that college educators fail to understand the effects racism has over their African Americans students (Johnson-Bailey, Ray, & Lasker-Scott 2014).

Historically, there have been constant laws and regulations that undervalue minorities in America, such as the Jim Crow law (Aldridge, 1999). The Critical Race theory (CRT) tend to show a constant trend of African Americans that are unequally treated within the education setting (Bernal, 2002). CRT explains how laws and regulations are embedded to serve White students, due to prior history of America, such as slavery (Hiraldo, 2010). With the lack of resources, Black students have been given a disadvantage for opportunities. Education serves as a platform in America, as it shows a form of equality (Morgan, 1995).

The findings show an overwhelming amount of microaggression that occurred in the classroom. For instance, Katy was in a classroom when she reported, "When I raised my hand [my professor] would never call on me." Katy felt rejected and frustrated because her professor ignored her. Katy indicated while being in the class had questions about class material for her professor, but he would not acknowledge her. Solorzano et al. (2000) revealed the classroom may appear to be equal, but inequity and discrimination still exist in a subtle and hidden form. CRT interprets that many professors have ownership of the curriculum, thus their philosophy of knowledge can work against students of color (Hiraldo, 2010). This type of discrimination is silent and can cause damaging effects towards students. Similarly, students across the country experience some form of microaggression which is the challenge that PWIs encounter. Mac Donald (2014) points out that microaggression is a new face of racism in higher education. For

instance, discrimination was silenced on the campus of Missouri State University. The African American students soon received public attention regarding the racist acts when their well-known football team, the Missouri Tigers, decided not to play until the university resolved the issue (Femer & Wing, 2015). Through this display the students at Missouri State University shed light on discrimination in higher education and made headlines throughout the nation by bringing awareness to microaggression (Femer & Wing, 2015).

Research Questions #2. How do African American students at a PWI respond to microaggression in their classroom? The muted-group theory examines people's unwillingness to speak up or defend themselves when they are placed in stressful situations (Kramarae, 2005). Responding to actions of microaggression could result in discouragement such as "move on" or "get over it". Not many students in the study responded back to their form of microaggression. Many were just baffled due to the fact they were just a victim of a terrible notion that was played against them. Only two participants attempted to respond by informing the title IX office on campus or speaking up for the account of their race.

The actions of Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the national anthem caused uproar throughout the country (Jacobs, 2016). This hot topic was the center of discussion in Nick's class. With only three African Americans in his class, his white counterparts were engaged. Nick did not respond to these actions, "I just felt like it was a subject that shouldn't be talked about but they were talking about it so openly and it just made me feel a certain way, [uneasy]." Nick was looking for someone else to take a stand, for instance his professor, "I think that the teacher should have cut the conversation off

before it got deeper." Darnell is an example of another student that did not engage when the professor targeted her discriminatory notions regarding her past educational experience. Her professor assumed that Darnell needed extra assistance towards earning her degree, "And I am very accepting and passive to rude remarks, to prejudice assumptions because it's going to happen again. So I don't stress it." If students of color are not feeling supported and are racially discriminated against by faculty and staff this can have a harming effect (Eggleston and Miranda, 2009).

The muted-group theory provides an explanation for an observed phenomenon that the individual that belongs to the lesser race is quickly shut down or casted out (Orbe, 1998). Ironically, Simone decided to take a stand, but the results did not go as planned when she reported her professor of discriminatory actions against her, "he [the dean] said are you sure those are racist comments or just statements about stuff that people say." When Simone noticed that this approach was not successful she went to the Title IX office,

> They tried to actually take away from what the situation was to make it seem like
> I was doing this to get a word out, but actually I was doing it for myself because
> this is something that I wanted to do.

After the meeting she had with her department chair, the Title IX officer, and her professor still nothing was resolved. In a matter of fact her department decided they would take the initiative and close the case.

> They reported it back to the discrimination office because after [the meeting].
> They [the department chair] said, we talked to them [The Title IX office]. We let

them know that everything is okay and we talked to you and it's fine. Then they

down played everything.

When Simone attempted to take a stand for what was right, she was shut down

and motioned to move one. The institution's lack of support left the student with minimal

resources to help her succeed academically (Davis, 2004). As a result students are left to

defend these microaggressions on their own. While others are willing to stand for what is

right, majority sit down in the hurt or wait for others to initiate.

Research Questions #3. What do African American students at a PWI think can

be done to improve the microaggression climate in their classrooms? Whenever there is

an act that needs to be corrected it is best to ask the victim. Every student that

participated in this research was able to provide suggestions to reduce microaggression

that happens across campus. CRT can also be used when understanding the campus

climate. A PWI may increase their numbers with students of color, but not enough is

being done regarding excellent exclusiveness (Benton, 2000). Furthermore, advocacy of

treating others fairly was most common throughout the research conducted as far as

solutions provided by students. KM was exposed to a town meeting on campus when the

community blamed Black students for crimes around the town. The members of the

community began to blame more specifically the black students from a metropolitan area,

"Or make them think about, like if I just fight insults with insults then you're not, you

know you're not learning anything um so just trying to provide factual information like in

a more positive manner." KM even suggested that the campus and the community should

come together for a cause everyone should work for, "Like it needs to be something

inclusive like we all need to come together um or we all go somewhere and clean

something up for the community." Some students that have experienced this high level of microaggression have taken a positive aspect to turn it around.

W.E.B. Dubois knew the lingering effects of educational racism and stressed equal opportunities for everyone (Aldridge, 1999). Advocating fairness was another way students that participated in the study indicated was a necessity for their success. Darnell, is a graduate assistant in her office on campus and she mentioned, "So I definitely advocate for everyone being treated fairly, everyone being treated equally and just don't show special treatment towards anyone regardless of their skin color." Darnell expressed she was placed in a situation where she did not feel included. Just as DuBois was not accepted by his white colleagues while attending Harvard, thus almost 90 years later and nothing has changed (Du Bois, 1968). Educating faculty and staff, this is simply a student's belief that everyone should be treated the equally. Assuming that everyone has the same advantages is inaccurately incorrect. Professors must be educated on the delays of microaggression for African American students in order to create a conducive learning environment. In any case it's the voice of the students that must be heard to correct the issue at hand.

Recommendations For College Student Affairs

Addressing the matter of microaggression in today's society is very important. To ensure success for African American students in higher education numerous areas should be addressed to retain students of color, academic success, inclusion, and provide a safe space, especially in the classroom. African American students should be made to feel safe in reporting incidences of microaggressions. When microaggressions persist, institutions need to establish ways to help victimized students cope. These recommendations provide

guidance for institutions and African American students for building and promoting academic success.

- Create a safe approachable climate for African American students to report incidences of microaggression. For instance, an anonymous reporting system could be formed. A campaign could be implemented to not only inform people to be cautious of how things are said or done that might constitute microaggression, but also one encouraging students to report any biases or microaggressions they encounter. Penn State University's provost office developed an effective strategy for this by posting over one thousand images of a stop sign in the form of posters and magnets telling students to "be the difference" and "take a stand for a positive campus climate" (McGrady, 2016). The posters address various conditions of a "bias incident" that may be considered discrimination, bigotry, inequity, sexual assault, injustice, and more. This could involve the entire campus community in the reporting process.

- Invest in mandatory diversity and inclusion training for faculty, staff, and administrators-- PWIs need to invest in a training program that will provide accurate results according to Denver (2016). Faculty, staff, and students should have mandatory inclusion training by individuals that have done research and are knowledgeable about the topic. The trainings should include ways to end microaggression in a way that guards students' identity. It should also be emphasized that cultural inclusion is a lifestyle change and not done over night.

- Increasing microaggression awareness among faculty --Diversity training should include how to listen for microaggression in the classroom and how to address the

problem as soon as possible. Training should involve terms and assumptions to stay away from phrases such as, "I do not see color" or "it's so much better now" (Pace, 2015). The phrase "I do not see color" can indicate a microinvalidation, thus denying racial identity (Sue et al, 2010). Neglecting the fact there is a problem with race in our society would not be helping the student. It would be best to be aware of the problems that are occurring all over campus, but especially in the classroom.

- Diversity and inclusion office --Institutions should consider having an office that includes cultural inclusion. Part of the services provided could be mentors for students. The mentor can help the student identify difficult situations dealing with microaggression that may occur in the resident hall, classroom, etc. This would be a way students can combat microaggression

- Provide faculty with incentives for professional development in diversity and inclusion – Faculty members will have certain initiatives when supporting multicultural events, so students can see support from their faculty members. In return, the faculty members will be able to gain knowledge about difference cultures.

- Encourage personal development in multicultural knowledge-- African American students in this study gave recommendations for faculty and staff members of the university to further their knowledge on African American history to better understand the background of their students, rather than to follow stereotypes.

- Create opportunities for cross- cultural interaction across the campus community—registered student multicultural organizations in partnership with the

cultural inclusion could construct programs to enhance a multi-culture interactions. This will provide all faculty, staff, and students the opportunity meet new people and to become open to all walks of life.

- Colleges and universities should balance intellectual discourse about controversial topics with a need to protect students who may feel marginalized. They should familiarize faculty, staff, and students about trigger warnings, microaggressions, and safe spaces.

- Students should be allowed to opt out of curriculum they disagree with or find offensive.

- Professors should warn college and university students about sensitive content in literature.

- Colleges and universities should have speech codes to protect students from intentionally hurtful language. Speech codes are rules or regulations limiting, restricting, or banning speech beyond the strict legal limitations upon freedom of speech or press found in the legal definitions of harassment, slander, libel, and fighting words (AAUP, 1994).

Limitations and Recommendations and for Future Studies

Sample size and trustworthiness were the two major limitations to this study. Although the study demonstrated evidence of microaggression in the lives of the six participants, the findings are not generalizable due to the small sample size. This qualitative study provided rich data for identifying microaggression concepts, such as microinsult, microassault, and microinvalidation, yet researcher bias may have affected the interpretation of the data, especially given at the researcher is an African American

who has also experienced microaggression numerous times throughout her life. A triangulated study with a quantitative element could have provided a higher level of reliability and helped limit researcher bias.

The main focus of this study was based on the spaces on campus. Many students expressed that the city reflected discriminatory actions towards people of color. Furthermore, due to limited accessibility the researcher could only gather a few students that was available for part 1 and part 2 of the research. Future research could see how the town, where the college is located, can affect students. Further studies to research would be how students use social media to express their frustrations with microaggression.

This study has provided evidence that microaggression happens in many spaces at a PWI. Recommendations would include a quantitative study of all students to indicate if everyone experiences some form of microaggression or just minority students. This particular study focused solely on microaggression on a college campus. Some of the participants emphasized incidents of microaggression within the college town. A recommendation of additional research would be to conduct a qualitative study to identify minority students that has been a victim of discrimination within the college town.

Conclusion

W.E.B. Dubois was able to express the actions of microaggression when it was widely accepted over 100 years ago. Still today African American students in higher education at a PWI can relate to Dubois and his experience. CRT is relevant regarding White faculty members which fail to be transferable within the classroom towards students of color, thus making it hard for African American students to learn. The muted group theory was helpful in explaining why and how students' voices go unheard.

Microaggression helps us to address everyday emotional turmoil by changing our perception, our culture and our language towards every individual we come in contact with. Studies have shown that instructors would rather ignore microaggression or believe that it does not exist (Boysen, 2012). Therefore it behooves faculty to develop a higher level of sensitivity to direct and indirect microaggression in order to protect their minority students and enhance their ability to learn.

To know if microaggression was progressive within the midsize PWI, research was conducted to understand the experiences, the responses, and the suggestions from African American college students. Every student that participated in the study experienced some form of Microaggression at a PWI. Three out of the six students responded to microaggression while the others did not say anything. Although three individuals responded the ending result was not conclusive. Every student provided suggestions on ways their situation could have been different. Through education students of color believe this can eliminate microaggression. Ending microaggression would mean that students would feel safer, free to participate, and better prepared to learn. Students and faculty should realize and work together to heighten their understanding of how words can hurt deeply. This study demonstrated the need of better accommodation for African American students that attend a PWI. To begin to actively change, we have to first identify the problem. This study reveals that there is a problem. The next step should be to conduct a larger study, including quantitative methodology, to determine how students of color may be affected across the United States.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Greetings!

My name is Courtney Jones. I am a graduate student here at EIU in the College Student

Affairs program. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an

African American student attending a Predominantly White Institution. Your

participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you

do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. A copy of my thesis will

be available on Booth Library next year if you would like to review it. Again thank you

for taking time out of your busy schedule to be a part of this study. Please submit

toclthomas2@eiu.edu by September 1, 2016

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at the email address

provided, or my thesis advisor, Dr Catherine Polydore atcpolydore@eiu.edu

Submitting the completed form to the researcher, denotes your consent to participate in

phase 1 of the two phase study.

Demographic Information:

1.   First name:

2.   Age:

3.   Major:

4.   Gender: M   F   Other

5.   Year in School:

Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior   Graduate Student   Recently

Graduated

6.   A name you would like to be called (Pseudonym):

_____

Questions about race related discomforts:

Please take the time to answer the following questions. You do not need to complete it in one

sitting. In fact, I would really appreciate if you will do it over time, as more experiences come to

mind. As you think about those experiences, consider:

- Where they occurred (classroom, workplace, office, library, food court, etc.)?

- With whom (classmate, staff, faculty) they occurred?

- How the experience made you feel?

- How you responded.

Please describe in as much detail as possible, multiple experiences with racial prejudice,

stereotypes, or discrimination while being at EIU. You can describe as many as you would like.

Experiences could range from comments from anyone on campus (faculty, staff, and classmates)

to discrimination at on-campus workplace or in the classroom.

Experience 1:

Experience 2:

Experience 3:

Phase 2

Thank you for describing your racially impacted moments at EIU. The purpose of your presence is to collect further information and get some clarification about the experiences you described, so that my reporting will be as accurate as possible. In addition, I will be asking you how you responded throughout these experiences. Your participation in this study will be voluntary and there will be no penalty if you chose not to participate. Interviews should last between 20-30 minutes. Thank you again for you time.

Questions from this phase will be based on participants' responses in phase 1. The main purpose is to get clarification. Follow up question example:

- I read in your statement regarding your classroom experience that you felt left out. Can you describe what exactly made you feel excluded from your classmates?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Microaggression in the College Environment: Narratives of African American Students at a Predominantly White Institution

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Courtney L Jones, Graduate Student from the College Student Affairs department at Eastern Illinois University. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an African American student attending a Predominantly White Institution that has experienced hostile, derogatory, or negative racial insults while being in college. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of African American students that have undergone hostile, derogatory, or negative racial insults while attending a predominately White Institution. This study would be able to help identify if there is an issue of racial tension on campus.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Complete a pre-interview questionnaire, explaining specific incidents that happened to you on campus that would be considered hostile, derogatory, or negative racial insults.

Participate in a 30-45 minute interview to discuss your experiences as an African American student attending a Predominantly White Institution that has experienced hostile, derogatory, or negative racial insults while being in college.

All interviews will be audiotaped. The researcher and the faculty thesis advisor will be allowed to listen to the audio. To further help you in confidentiality, your name and other identifiers will be removed in the transcriptions.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is no more than minimal risk expected from this research study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The outcome of this research will benefit you directly, yet it may help be an outlet towards some aggression that you would like to talk about.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. This interview will be audiotaped for transcription purposes only. All names within the interview will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms to ensure your confidentiality. Once the interview is transcribed, you will be given the transcript for your review and approval. All audio recordings and transcripts will be locked in a secure location for three years upon completion of research study and then be destroyed.

Data may be released to the faculty advisor of this study, Dr. Catherine Polydore, While this is not very likely, it may occur if further guidance it needed in the transcript and coding interviews.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

Courtney L Jones (Researcher)

Dr. Catherine Polydore

Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL   61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date