A Different Kind of Black, But the Same Issues: Black Males and Counterstories at a Predominantly White Institution

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Much has been written about Black men over the years and in different institutional contexts (e.g., community colleges, predominantly White institutions [PWIs], and historically Black colleges and universities). However, very little of this research has emphasized how the intersecting identities of Black men shape their experiences in higher education. To this end, this article draws from intersectionality and counternarratives, both of which has roots in critical race theory, to discuss how race, class, and gender informs the experiences of two Black males enrolled in a PWI. This article concludes with critical implications to help institutional leaders at PWIs be more intentional about creating a more supportive and inclusive campus climate for middle-class Black male students.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a proliferation of research on Black males in higher education over the last several years (e.g., see Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2012; Jackson & Moore, 2006, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008a, Wood, 2012). Considering that the enrollment of Black males in postsecondary education comprise between 4.3% and 4.5% from 1976-2006, this research is warranted (Harper & Porter, 2012). Current research on Black males discusses their experiences at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs; Palmer & Wood, 2012), community colleges (Wood, 2012), and predominantly White institutions (PWIs; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008a, 2008b). Recognizing and discussing the experiences of Black men in

diverse institutional environments is critical because their experiential reality is different given the institutional type they attend (Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Black men are also diverse. As Harper and Nichols (2008) explain, there is tremendous within group differences among Black men. Most of the research on Black men in higher education, however, treats them as a monolith. More attention to the heterogeneity among Black male collegians could lead to better practices to improve outcomes among Black males (Palmer & Wood, 2012; Strayhorn, 2013). Given this, the present article will draw from intersectionality, which has its roots in critical race theory (CRT) to understand how race, gender, and income inform the experiences of Black males at PWIs. In conveying the stories of the participants, this article employs a counternarrative approach, which is also rooted in CRT. This article concludes with implications to provide institutional leaders at PWIs context regarding how to help create a more supportive and inclusive campus environment for middle-class Black male students.

While some researchers have used an intersectional approach to examine the experiences of Black men in postsecondary education, many have not. For example, Wood has investigated the experiences of Black men in community colleges, focusing specifically on their relationships with faculty (see Wood & Turner, 2011), predisposition to transfer to four-year institutions (see Wood & Palmer, 2013), and critical factors that helps to facilitate their retention and persistence (see Wood & Williams, 2013). Jackson and Moore (2006, 2008) have examined the experiences of Black males in PreK-12 and higher education contexts without using an intersectional lens.

Notwithstanding, some researchers *have* used an intersectionality framework in their research on Black men. For example, Harper (2006) examined the intersection of academic identity (i.e., high-achieving) and Black men in higher education. Similarly, Strayhorn and Scott (2012) focused on the intersection of Black male collegians and sexual orientation, while Palmer and Scott (2013) explored how socioeconomic status informs the experiences of Black males at HBCUs. While the aforementioned research is critical, little research has examined how race, class, and gender shape the experiences of Black students at PWIs (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008b).

According to Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007), researchers need to place greater emphasis on examining how race, gender, and other factors intersect to engender disadvantages for Black students at PWIs. While not referring specifically to class, Smith and colleagues (2007) argued that Black males have *raced* and *gendered* experiences throughout their journeys along the educational pipeline that negatively impact their educational aspirations and outcomes. Further, they explained that PWIs often respond negatively to the presence of Black males in comparison to White students, as well as in comparison to other students of color. Although many associate CRT with only looking at the racialized experiences of people of color, CRT has been used as a research method to examine how other subordinated identities (e.g., gender, class, sexual orientation) and forms of oppression (e.g., sexism, homophobia, ableism) influence the lived experiences of people of color (Lynn & Adams, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Perez-Huber (2010) argues, "CRT in educational research unapologetically centers the ways race, class, gender, sexuality and other forms of oppression manifest in the educational experiences of people of color" (p. 78). In addition, Smith and colleagues (2007) states that most research focusing on the racial experiences of Black and Latino males renders invisible their unique gender and/or race-gender identity oppression.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) is the guiding theoretical perspective for this study. The experiences of Black males in higher education are often racialized, so CRT serves as a useful lens for the analysis of these complicated experiences. CRT in education has a multidisciplinary origin. It is primarily grounded in critical legal studies, however it also borrows from critical pedagogy, Black Studies, Chicano Studies, Black feminist and Chicana feminist thought, multiculturalism and multicultural education (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Ladson Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT into education in an attempt to advance research and theory where issues of race were concerned. In their article, Ladson Billings and Tate argued that race was under-theorized in education and that studies at the time did not have a way to discuss race that would move the field forward. CRT draws from a broad base of literature in law, sociology, and history (Yosso, 2005). Critical race theory serves as a challenge to the dominant discourse on race. Scholars, using CRT, attempt to disrupt master narratives and interrupt the processes of reproducing White supremacist, racially biased outcomes. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) argue that these notions attempt to hide the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in society. A CRT framework allows for marginalized populations to have their lived experiences and stories validated. CRT is not the means used to validate—the stories and experiences shared are already valid—but is used as a mechanism for moving the experiences form the margin to center.

A major tenet of CRT is counterstorytelling or producing counternarratives. People of color and other oppressed groups are given space to voice their experiences and concerns in an effort to counter the discourse that marginalizes their existence (Lopez, 2003). Race and racism are placed at the center of the narrative and counternarrative in CRT. These theoretical foundations provide the tools for understanding the complicated existence of Black male students in college. Our goal was to focus on their experiences and center their voices in our discussions. By centering, we mean that our intent is to have their voices visible and at the forefront of our work. With CRT, the participants in a study are valued and seen as co-contributors of knowledge being explored in research projects. We understand that as researchers, we have the authority to choose and craft which stories we tell, but a commitment to a reflexive and respectful methodology grounds us in an understanding of the value of our research participants.

Participant Selection

The two cases we analyze in this article are part of a larger qualitative project on the intersectional experiences of Black males at PWIs. The larger project started in the fall of 2013 at a private university in the North Eastern United States. The students for this study were recruited from the undergraduate Diaspora Union (DU). Campus advisors were also instrumental in suggesting students for the study. In order to participate, students had to: (a) identify as Black/African American; (b) identify as male; (c) identify as a non-first generation college student; and, (d) be a full-time undergraduate student. We decided to focus on full-time students because we wanted to get a sense of their experiences in all aspects of campus life including, but not limited to, experiences in the classroom, on campus, in the cafeteria, in the

residence hall, in group meetings, and so forth. None of the participants were paid for their participation in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The participants met with one of the researchers to discuss the aims of the study and ask any questions they had about the procedures and the larger goals of the study. Data were collected through two methods—focus groups and individual interviews. After the focus groups, a researcher contacted participants to set up individual interviews to take place on campus. Each student participated in the focus group and one individual in-depth interview. The individual interview followed up on themes that arose from the focus group and also explored a more in-depth understanding of students' experiences on campus. The interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and usually lasted between 60-75 minutes.

An *open coding* method, which involved analyzing the data line by line, was used to analyze the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this process, data were broken down into smaller sections and reread to become familiar with the text; a code list was created to describe the data; data were assigned codes based on themes that emerged; data were separated based on assigned codes and reread to see if any codes needed to be shifted based on a cross-examination of the data. After the final coding process, the data were placed in thematic categories and then interpreted by the researcher. During interpretation, analytic questions were asked related to the themes and later to existing literature. In addition, selected participants were consulted about the emerging themes as a form of member checking. Pseudonyms were used in the transcription of the data to protect student identity.

FINDINGS

The narratives we explore in this article come from interviews with Garvey, a first-year student, and Solomon a second-year student, both students at Oak University (pseudonym). Both of these men identify as Black, middle-class, and non-first generation college students. Garvey identifies as heterosexual and Solomon identifies as gay. These students were interviewed individually after participating in one of the initial focus groups. Both shared stories of racial microaggressions and the stresses of navigating their college experiences as Black males. Both discussed the different ways in which their identities impacted their existence and how the dominant framings of Black males impacted their interactions with peers and employees of the university. Their narratives are organized and framed by the themes raised during the interviews—identity/perceptions and Blackness; racial microaggressions and campus experiences; parents and educational messages; internalized oppression; and, the "proving them wrong" syndrome.

Garvey's Experience

Educational drive and parental drive. Garvey (pseudonym) was one of the youngest students in the study. At the time of the interview he was a first-year student. He was very active on campus and quickly became known by his peers and faculty members as a self-driven and dedicated student. Garvey often talked about taken advantage of the opportunity to be in college and making the most of it. He knew that many young Black men did not have the

opportunity to enjoy a private college education. For him, educational success was not an option. He grew up in a household where education was stressed. It was important to share his story of his educational training before college and to understand how discussions about college were situated in his family. He spoke of his mother and father as being extremely intelligent. His mother is an attorney and his father is a nurse. In one of our meetings he reflected on the importance of his parents in his educational foundation:

> My mother went to college. I don't know the exact dates. She went to Liberal Arts College (pseudonym) in Massachusetts and then she went to Small Private College (pseudonym) in Atlanta. And then she went to Law School (pseudonym) in Massachusetts. My dad was in the Army; he was a nurse in the Army. He was doing that and he didn't go to school but my dad was very intelligent. He always used to read and write. I learned how to read and write from my dad. He would always bring me into the basement and make me learn. And take little notes. I remember this. Then we would go out and do stuff and play and then I would have to come back and read into the alphabet more. So he taught me how to write and read.

Garvey described his father as a nurse who did not go to school. His mother went to college and then to graduate school. Although his father did not go to college, he learned how to become a nurse through the military. Indeed, you cannot become a nurse without schooling, but Garvey made the distinction between military training/education and the more traditional route to college. He also qualified that despite the fact that his father "didn't go to school," he was very intelligent. Garvey wanted to make sure that intelligence was not tied to school and that his father is intelligent even though he did not take the same route as his mother:

> He used to always teach me life lessons. Like my dad is not the greatest person in the world but he is very smart he taught me life lessons. I can tell that he reads books all the time. He suggests books and things for me to read. It's just something about his character that's like…it imposes this intelligence. You can have like a simple conversation with him and then he just be spitting wisdom and breaking stuff down.

Again, he highlights his father's intelligence and his habit of reading. Not only did his father read, but he also passed the knowledge to Garvey. This counternarrative highlights the importance of the father-son relationship and alternative forms of learning that result. These simple conversations instilled a sense of intellectual curiosity in Garvey. During our discussions he talked about his desire to "break stuff down" as a result of the many conversations he has with his father. This interaction showcases the ways in which educational practices can be transferred within a family structure. Again, although Garvey's father did not go to college, he was able to create a solid foundation for him to be successful on a college campus.

For Garvey, the idea of college was implanted at a very young age. Both his parents stressed the importance of education. Their story contradicts the popular deficit narratives of the dysfunctional Black households with uninvolved parents that *don't care* about education (Ladson-Billings, 2007). His parents stressed the importance of education and not settling in life. He pushed to be more than just a *negative statistic*:

The idea of college started when I was young. My dad said he wanted me to go to college in Boston at first. He said that Massachusetts was where the best schools were. So after that, my parents got divorced, so I don't really see him that often. My mom was always talking about school. She always urged her children to go to college. I have three siblings and we are all in college now, wait my youngest sister is in high school and is about to go to college. I have a brother who's in college and I have a sister who's in college. My mother always urged her kids to go to college. So for us, if we didn't go to college we would have to leave the house. We couldn't stay there.

Again, education was not an option. All of his siblings were pushed to college and understood that if they did not attend, they would not be allowed to live at home. His parents saw education as an equalizer and one of the only ways for Black people to be successful. They saw education as a key to open up doors to great opportunities. As a young Black male, he was repeatedly told that education was the only way he could ensure he would not end up as a statistic and meet the fate of many of his classmates. Here he discussed his mother's view of being above average:

To be successful, my mom always said, "You don't want to be the average African-American. You don't want to be average, you want to be more. You don't want to just be a statistic." That didn't really [make sense] to me until I became a freshman in high school. I didn't really start to think about college serious until my sophomore year. And then I was like, "Yo, I really need to get good grades." I always wanted to go to college; it's never been a doubt in my mind, I always wanted to go to college. There's never been a point in my life when I didn't want to go to college.

Garvey's mother, as a person who successfully navigated higher education, understood the benefits of a quality education. She understood the negative representations of Black males and wanted to ensure her children did not meet that fate. He described his mother as stern when it came to his school performance. He understood that college would only be possible if he put in the work to attend. The talk of college for him started early and having been exposed at such a young age, he received reinforcement of the idea throughout his life. The constant reminders kept him focused and eventually he was admitted to a number of schools, and decided to attend Oak University. His in-home educational preparation is key in helping one understand the importance of parental college attendance and the generational transfer of cultural capital to future generations.

Double consciousness and resisting popular representations. In this next section, we focus on the experiences of Garvey at Oak University. He attended the institution with the support of his family and an understanding of the importance of education. He also had his mother as a resource to assist him in navigating some of the issues he faced while on campus. Even with this support, he often found himself dealing with issues he did not plan to encounter. As a Black, middle-class male on campus, he often struggled with the ways people perceived Black males. He was not an athlete, nor first-generation student, but he felt that people put all Black men into the same box, as described by Harper and Nichols (2008). In one of our conversations, he wanted to speak about his feelings related to the one-dimensional representations of Black males. He immediately began to focus on representations of Blackness in popular media and how it impacted perceptions people had of him:

I hate it I hate it. The show "Love and Hip-Hop," I hate it so much. I hate it with a passion. I mean it's like entertainment and all, but we all are not just rappers and stuff like that. We are more than that. We're not popularized, or not the majority, so I just really hate the fact that sometimes… I'm wise enough to not believe it. The stuff that I see. But some people are not wise enough. Like, you can talk to me and some African-American students and we won't believe what we see. But then you can talk to some African-American students who would believe what they see and that's who they are supposed to be. I'm sorry but if you talk to White people, I think they probably would believe everything that they see on TV about us. It just bothers me to the point where it's like, "What are you going to do about it?" It becomes their reality.

Oak University is not very diverse and there is not a lot of visible interracial interaction seen on campus. For Garvey, the lack of interracial interaction caused people to look to popular culture to get their "dose of reality" about different people. He struggled with the idea that people on campus could not tell the difference between what they saw on television and reality. He often talked about how people looked at him and assumed he was like what they saw on reality shows. They assumed he was first-generation, poor, and not smart. He constantly attempted to upset these notions but was often disheartened when he thought about the fact that without positive interactions with diverse groups, what his White peers saw on TV became their reality. This perceived reality impacted the way they viewed him. Dubois (1903) discusses this double consciousness, the two-ness that the American Negro feels when having to view himself through the lens of others. Garvey and his peers discussed feeling pressured to behave in a certain manner because of how people may perceive their actions. This burden of representation manifested in social and academic settings.

Garvey talked about his inner struggles with representation of Black males and went on to discuss his feelings and how he internalized some of these beliefs. As a Black male on campus, he is forced to think about his race and how he is perceived in addition to his student work. In hostile, non-diverse college environments, Black males balance the burden of representation with doing well academically and fitting in socially:

Sometimes I feel bad because sometimes I start to believe it. Like what they think about us. There are moments where I question myself. Like I'm at a time right now where I question everything. I'm trying to make sure I make the right moves to make the best decisions. I don't want to be caught in this trap. Because I feel like that's where African-Americans go wrong, or Black people in general, we get caught in this trap where we want to be this thing on TV. Like I feel like Africans and African-Americans, we are at war with ourselves because we believe everything that we see on TV about us and we believe what this White person is saying about us. We are at war with ourselves.

Navigating the college environment is difficult and complex. Garvey often struggled with his identity in relation to the external perceptions. He wanted people to know him as an individual and not be overshadowed by society's infatuation with presenting one-dimensional caricatures of Black males. Above, he mentions starting to believe the images he sees and his struggles with internalized oppression. Similar to double consciousness, dealing with identifying as a Black male on a college campus and seeing themselves through the lens of others, often

takes a toll for these students in a way that's not shared by their White peers. He understood the landscape and aimed to avoid the *traps* of becoming the image that was put before him in the media. He wanted to be seen as an individual, but felt the added pressure of being a representative for other Black males. He also articulated an understanding that he is not alone in these struggles and others were facing internal conflicts related to their identities as well.

Another issue that Garvey faced is the belief that all Black students were *diversity admits* and not as qualified as the other students. Students often approached him as a *charity case* and did not view him as an academic peer. These views often led to Garvey to deal with disrespect from classmates because of their misconceived notion of who he was and what he was capable of accomplishing:

> I don't want to be like inferior to anyone. You know, I treat people with respect. I speak and I treat everyone with respect. It sounds idealistic, but I want everyone on the same scale just equal. I don't know man. I'm going to sound crazy but there's something about the White race. You have the White people who understand, then you have White people who just do not. Like [White] people don't know about anyone because they don't have to be subjected to people of other races like Asians, Africans, Latinos, and stuff like that.

Garvey had the experience of being one of very few Black males on campus. He was often the only person of color in his classroom and the only one on his residence hall floor. He had experiences with being singled out on the floor and often felt alone in his struggles. He voiced concerns about the importance of creating a safe space where everyone could feel as if their presence is valued on campus.

Although he discussed his struggles, he also articulated his desire to be different. The negative experiences have also served as a source of motivation. He used the pressure to keep him focused on proving everyone wrong:

> It kind of motivates me; I want to be challenged. I don't want to do the same things that everybody else is doing. I don't want to do the same things these white students are doing. I want to prove everybody wrong. I'm very motivated to do things. I use it as a positive thing to motivate me.

Students can struggle with the internalization of oppression, yet in dealing with the conflict are able to find ways to overcome and thrive in hostile environments. Garvey understood the issues he dealt with were not the same for his White peers and that he has an added burden of representation. At times, it seemed as if he got bogged down with the pressure when reflecting on his campus experiences, but at other times he was able to get motivated and keep pushing to achieve high levels of success. He understood that if he was successful, there would be a chance for him to counteract the negative perceptions of him and other students of color on campus. He welcomed this challenge, but also acknowledged the toll that it took upon him.

When we were about to end the interview session, he asked if I had a little more time for him to tell me about a problem he was dealing with on campus. He then proceeded to tell me about a situation that was taking place with his roommate that he did not know how to handle:

> My roommate called me a *nigga* the other day. My roommate he never said the N-word before, but he just started saying it to me. He said like, "Yo, wassup my nigga." And I'm I stopped at first and I was like, "What?" And I feel like I signed up for the school and I'm gonna hear the word once in a while. I'm here so it's not like I can do anything. He's not from the hood. He's like your average White student here. I want to say that I'm not comfortable with it. When I hear it I'm just like, "Damn that gives him power." I haven't asked him about it yet because he's only said it about twice.

The exchange with his roommate is complicated. For one, Garvey did not know how to feel about his White roommate's use of the N-word. What was a bit more troubling is that he convinced himself that he was going to hear the word on campus at some point. During this part of the discussion he was a little irritated at the fact that a White student called him *nigga* and he did not know how to respond. Some might say he should have responded violently to the word and "showed the White boy a lesson" for using that term, but he understood the complexity of the situation and where he would end up based on a violent response. Rather than outright address it, he was dealing with it internally, trying to understand what could have led his roommate to feel comfortable with calling him *nigga,* especially when that was not the type of relationship they enjoyed:

> And I was like, "What was up with this kid?" I don't even say it! I don't even say it! Back home I may say the word with my boys. But now that I'm here, it's like that word has meaning now. I don't even say it to some of the other guys. The Black guys."

While looking at Garvey squirm in his seat as he retold the story, it seemed as if he felt he was letting his people down and relinquishing his power by allowing a White male to call him *nigga* without consequence. He even tried to rationalize it when he stated he felt like the term would be used against him at some point because of the makeup of the campus. It is troubling to think that a Black male student expects to be called a *nigger* on a college campus. The idea that certain behaviors should be expected highlights the work that needs to be done to create safer campus climates for all members of the university community.

Solomon's Experience

Solomon was the oldest student in the study. He was a junior at the time who was very active on campus with the NAACP and other student organizations. He attended Oak University with training in social justice and activism. As a high school student, he led student groups and was able to connect on issues with community leaders and elected officials. He has a history of college attendance in his family. He mentioned that both of his parents graduated from the same selective, research-intensive institution and were both athletes and activists during their college years. He mentioned that his grandparents were also college graduates. Solomon was taught by his parents to be outspoken and to stand for justice. He knew how to navigate most issues on campus, but he still faced hardships at Oak University. Similar to Garvey, he became increasingly frustrated with people trying to put him on a box based on their perceptions of who he was as a Black male:

I'm not who they think I am. I'm able to recognize cues. I'm able to pick up on cues. I get stories from my parents. They tell me stories from their experiences in college. They both went to Upstate University. My mother was the captain of the track team and my father was a defensive end on the football team. That's how they paid for college. My mother is an attorney and my father is a pastor. So with my mother being an athlete and my father being an athlete, and my mother being [in a Black sorority], they told me a lot of the experiences that they had back in the day. And so knowing what they've gone through and the things that I've seen through my activism, I'm able to pick up on cues that most students are not able to pick up on.

Solomon discussed how he was taught by his parents and had been able to learn from their stories. As the child of college graduates, he was equipped with resources that a first-generation student would not typically be privy to during their transition to college. When he talked about "picking up on cues," he referred to how he analyzed different situations to understand the underlying context. He was always on guard and willing to fight for justice. This is how he was raised. He aimed to use his knowledge to be successful and better the lives of others:

At Oak University, they are not used to someone who is going to hold you accountable for the things. Most students would just probably report it to the multicultural office, or just keep it to themselves. But I'm not that way; I'm going to be vocal. When I tell other students about these issues they're like, "Why do you care?," "Why is it a problem?" They don't understand the significance of some of these issues. You know asking for ID or something like that. Some people would say that's protocol, but to me that's not protocol if I'm the only one you're asking for an ID.

Solomon was very vocal on campus and would try to assist his peers with recognizing unequal treatment or racist interactions on campus. He at times grew frustrated when students would not respond to their negative treatment on campus. As he stated, some students would tell the multicultural office, but would never go beyond them in reporting incidents. For Solomon, if something was wrong, it needed to be addressed.

Macro/microaggressions and differential treatment. Some of his peers thought he made situations worse by being vocal and some of the administration did not know how to handle his determination. Solomon was able to see injustice and had no problem addressing it. He felt as if the school rules were not applied equally to all students and this difference in treatment was often drawn along racial lines:

I'm tired of consistently having the rules apply differently to different people. I see *them* driving onto campus with a car full of kids and they only make them show one ID card and then they just go on through. But that doesn't happen if it's Black kids. When Jordan's brother was trying to pick her up they searched his car for drugs. The security guard just made an assumption that he had drugs in the car. Like when my boyfriend was bringing me and my friends back in, we are all Oak University students, but we all had to show our IDs. These are students that come the campus, get drunk, go to the residence halls, bust windows, strip down ceiling tiles, and rip out water fountains. You make such

of an effort to profile Black students when it's the guests of the White students that are coming on campus and destroying property.

Solomon articulated his frustration with campus policies that were only enforced for certain populations. A major issue for some students of color was the heightened security presence on campus. Oak University is a suburban school and has 24-hour security presence at all campus entrances. Students often say the university exists in a bubble and that all of the security is overkill based on the location of the institution. When you drive on to campus, the driver of the vehicle is supposed to show an Oak University ID card before they are allowed to drive on to campus. Many students of color talk about the fact that security made everyone in their vehicles show an ID in order to be let on campus. Solomon talked about how certain populations of students were allowed to circumvent the rules. He felt that security was so busy profiling the few people of color on campus while White students were damaging the campus and not profiled by security. For Solomon, students of color were *othered* on campus and constantly dealt with campus surveillance.

During the interview he was energized about telling his stories of mistreatment on campus. Although he was taught to deal with injustice, it did not shield him from the emotional stress of mistreatment on campus. He had faced a number of smaller issues on campus, but he shared two major events that he experienced during his time at Oak University. What follows is a longer story describing another negative interaction he had with campus security:

> Me and my boyfriend got stopped walking on to campus. We were walking through the gate, we weren't driving. So I showed [the security guard] my ID. So that didn't even suffice. He automatically wanted to see my boyfriend's visitors pass. My boyfriend didn't have a visitors pass because he wasn't staying the night. So then when we walked back over, I took precaution and I did make a visitors pass on my *iPad*. I expected something to happen, so that is why I went ahead and did it. So we got to the quad and who's there but another security officer. So he says, "Hey sir, I just want to make sure that he gets his visitors pass." This was not the same security officer. This was a different officer. So they had to have called another officer on campus to look out for "these two" and give a description of what we look like. What was funny is that it was parent's weekend. So people were coming in and out of campus who didn't go to the University but somehow we got singled out. So that's why I was ticked off. So that turned into a whole huge controversy. So I just realize, you know, that the rules apply differently to different students, you know. It's something that's expected just being on this campus you know.

Solomon articulated being singled out on campus during a busy parents' weekend. Usually people show identification when they are driving on to campus, but he was stopped, more than once, while walking on campus to be asked for an ID. This was during a busy weekend with crowds of people on campus, but his skin pigmentation stood out and he was apprehended. He paid tuition like everyone else, but articulated being made to feel as an outsider on campus. Similar to Garvey's incident with his roommate calling him *nigga*, Solomon also stated that treatment he received was to be *expected* on the campus. However, being the activist that he is, Solomon went to the campus safety office to report the incident:

Before I met with these people, I met with some of the other security guards. They weren't the chief. I tried to meet with them first, but they were not pleasant. One of them was a very aggressive. One was yelling at me. I was trying to explain to him what the rules were and the reasons why did not need a visitor's pass. It got reported because I took it upon myself to report it. That was a consistent thing. That wasn't just something I was experiencing, but something that other students of color were experiencing [as well]. I informed the chief of campus safety. I got in contact with the vice president. I even gave a report to the president of the University himself. I sent him a big packet of events that happened. All of it was documented, so you know, so he was aware of it.

Solomon addressed his concerns with his treatment on campus with the officers, but his report was not well received. However, Solomon did not stop there. He continued to follow the chain of command to ensure his story was heard and the administration was aware of the treatment of students of color on campus. He understood the way he was treated was wrong and that nothing would change if he kept it to himself. Even with the administration being made aware of his treatment and him meeting with the vice-president of the institution, he still faced other incidents on campus:

So I let the administration know about the incidents. I explained to them about the incident before when my roommate didn't want us there. My boyfriend had a visitor's pass and so my roommate didn't want us to stay in the room so they made us leave campus. So we had to stay at the train station overnight. We have a legit visitor's pass, but to force me to leave the room?! To go through all that trouble to bring the security guard and the residence hall director and two resident advisors?! And then escort us out of the building at 12:30 in the morning?! And then have us dumped off at the train station just to prove a point?! Ok so my guest doesn't have the right to stay because my roommate didn't want my guest here?! Ok. But the way the school conducted it. They just dropped us off there. It was explained to them that we had nowhere to go and they just dropped us there. So this was probably the worst experience we ever had. So that was in the packet that I sent to administration.

Here Solomon described another unpleasant incident with campus safety officers. He had been through a lot on campus and fought for the rights of others. He worked on campus to make it welcoming for all people, but he still dealt with horrible treatment by campus officials. In all of his work and experiences on campus he considered this the worst. He was taken from campus and driven to the city transportation station to sleep there overnight. For him, this was an example of the unequal treatment of students of color on campus. He did not think this would be the same course of action taken against a White wealthy student. For him, his race blinded people of his humanity. The perception they had of him and other Black males determined the type of treatment he received on campus.

Being Black, being gay, being a Black gay male. In addition to the mistreatment based on racialized perceptions, Solomon talked about his identity struggles he faced on campus as a middle-class, gay Black male. For him, being gay complicated his experiences and he often struggled with internal conflicts based on his multiple identities. When reflecting on the incidents with campus safety and his roommate, Solomon was able to categorize the treatment based on the intersection of his multiple identities: "So that was in the packet that I sent to

administration. But that's beside the point. That had to do with gay and Black." His treatment was complicated by him being Black and gay. He felt campus safety took issue with his Blackness, while his roommate took issue with his gayness and Blackness: "My roommate felt uncomfortable cause if my boyfriend came over he would go to sleep in the common room because he wasn't comfortable if my boyfriend was in the room. We made it very clear that we would never do anything in the room. Then again that's not my problem if you are uncomfortable." Solomon knew his roommate was not comfortable with having a gay roommate and assured him that he would never "do anything [sexual]" with his boyfriend in the room. Other students were allowed to bring their significant others into their rooms, but Solomon faced complications because of his sexual orientation.

When asked to describe his identity struggles, he mentioned feeling in conflict with himself based on the intersection of his multiple identities:

> I feel like I can't always be myself. It's a constant battle. Because being in a professional setting, I would say I often use my gay personality to mask my Black personality. I either feel this overwhelming pressure to make people feel comfortable because I think that there's this assumption that they're making about me. Then there are situations where I feel like I don't need to suppress my Blackness. So like, usually with White women, I am prone to mask my Blackness with gayness. And with White men, I often try to assert my Blackness. And kind of prove to them that, yes, I am an intimidating, culturally macho male, but at the same time I'm also smart enough intellectually spar with you. I'm smart and I'm badass!

Solomon articulated seeing himself through the lens of how others viewed him. Mitchell and Means (2014) posit that Black gay male students feel a need to code switch and hide parts of their identity more often than their gay White peers. Similarly, depending on the situation, Solomon seemed to hide parts of his identity. He viewed his gay identity as less threatening than his Black identity, so he "upped his gayness" when he wanted to make others feel comfortable in his presence. In other situations he "upped his Blackness" in order to counteract false perceptions of his masculinity and intellect.

Juggling different presentations of his identity was difficult to manage. Constantly thinking about what identity he needed to "up" was tiring for Solomon. His intersecting identities complicated his daily existence on campus:

> And then there other times when it's like I'm racially paranoid. Then I started being prideful because I'm making the assumption once again that you have these inferior expectations of me. In terms of my intellect; in terms of my accomplishments; [and] in terms of the complexity of my thought process and my character. Because I'm making the assumption that you think I'm inferior I'm going to be even more prideful and put it in your face that I'm Black and I'm smart.

Similar to Garvey, Solomon was aware of the perceptions associated with Black males and always tried to prove *them* wrong. He articulated feeling the need to highlight his accomplishments and intellect in an effort to counter the perceptions others held of Black males on campus. He understood that he lived with the burden of representation and unfortunately, having to serve as a representative for all Black males.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In this study two Black males articulated their realities and placed their experiences at the center of educational research. While this study provides critical insight into Garvey and Solomon's experiences at a PWI, it is preliminary in scope. This study, however, provides rich descriptive details of the participants and their experiences to help institutional officials assess the transferability of the findings to students at their institutions. The stories shared by Garvey and Solomon are very powerful and highlight issues that Black males continue to face on college campuses. Their stories highlighted their raced, gendered, and classed experiences as Black male college students. Although they are not first-generation students, some of their stories are indivisible from those of other Black male students (Strayhorn, 2008b; Harper, 2009). For example, Harper (2009) has noted that the experiences of Black men at PWIs are defined by racism and racial stereotypes. In fact, Harper, Davis, Jones, McGowan, Ingram, and Platt (2011) argue that even way Black men have been admitted to the university through similar admissions criteria as their White counterparts, they are still likely to be viewed as students who benefited from affirmative action. Findings from this current study echo that of other studies on Black men (see Cuyjet, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010). Specifically, this study revealed that regardless of the students' socio-economic status, and in some cases, sexual orientation, race continues to define the experiences of Black men on the campuses of PWIs (Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2010). Indeed, both of these students were prepared by their families to be successful in school, yet they still faced difficulty navigating their campus environments. They may have had a different upbringing than some of the first-generation Black males on campus, but they were all viewed in a similar lens by people on campus. Smith and his colleagues (2007) argue, "At minimum, Black males carry the burden of two negative social identities as the move through society, one as a member of the African American race (i.e., anti-Black racism) and the other as a Black male (i.e., Black misandry or anti-Black male attitudes and oppression" (p. 553). The experiences of being Black, being male, and being Black males intersect to impact the lived realities of the students in this study. Race and gender are visible markers that lead to negative treatment for Black male students at PWIs.

Although we only focused on a small portion of the experiences of two middle-class Black males, there stories are important in continuing to provide counterstories to the dominant narratives of Black males on campus. These students often feel the need to fight against negative assumptions about their existence on campus. They perform in a manner in which they feel shines a positive light, not only on themselves, but for other Black males. They exist on campus burdened by the forced responsibility of serving as representatives for all Black male students. Indeed, given the findings from this current study, PWIs need to be more intentional about creating a campus climate where Black males feel a sense of mattering and belonging. One of the ways to do this is to host forums about the importance of valuing diversity and facilitating cross-cultural interaction. Given the negative perceptions that the Black students' White peers had of minority students, providing outlets of this nature could be extremely beneficial to help create a more inviting campus climate for Black males on campus. In addition to implementing a forum to discuss issues of racial diversity, these forums could also be used to help educate the campus community about GLBT students.

Aside from hosting forums on diversity, institutions might also consider implementing programs to help students engage in meaningful interracial dialogue. An example of this might take the form of the *Bridging Building* program that was implemented at Shippensburg

University. With this program, a select group of students were trained to enter the classroom and facilitate discussions on racism and other forms of discriminatory behavior against minority students. Moreover, both students discussed issues with different forms of racial microaggressions. According to Solorzano and his colleagues (2000), racial microaggressions are subtle forms of racism, which can lead to psychological stress and cause minority students to prematurely depart from a university. Given Black students' encounters with racial microaggressions at PWIs, these institutions should not merely conduct a campus climate survey in order to better understand how pervasive racial microaggressions are for Black students, but also use the results of survey to implement programs and policies to help increase the campus climate for Black students. In addition to surveys, PWIs need to provide cultural competency training to institutional agents (e.g., faculty, staff, and administrators) to help them become aware of racial microaggressions and their impact on Black students and also provide them with knowledge about practices that could be used to support the development and success of Black students. Moreover, there also has to be an understanding that Black male college students are not a monolithic group. Socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, prior schooling experience, and other identities, all impact the educational experiences of Black male college students. Recognizing the intersecting identities of Black male college students will enable institutions of higher education to more effectively implement practices and programs to support the individualities of Black male collegians. Finally, scholars and practitioners must continue to counter the dominant narratives about Black male identity and their academic achievement.

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