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Black and Latiné College Student Expectations and Perceptions of a College Leadership's Responses to Nationally Known, Racially Biased Incidents

Grace Maxon-Clarke
St. John Fisher University, grace.maxon@oswego.edu

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Themes for student expectations were (a) no expectation: first-year student, COVID restrictions, primarily White institutions; (b) expectations met: met the needs of the White majority, public institution; and (c) expected different: expected more, expected different. Themes and categories regarding the student perspectives included (a) lack of trust/not genuine, trendy/performative, obligated; (b) predominately White community, silence of the White community, unsafe in the community; (c) systematic issues unanswered; and (d) areas for improvement: educational options, support for affinity groups, increased diverse faculty/staff, improved marketing, and continued support and effort.

The data resulted in a unique understanding of the Black and Latiné lived experiences and perspectives of the college leadership responses to the nationally known racially biased incidents. The students shared their hesitation and subsequent lack of trust in their PWI campus and campus leadership. Students shared that they hoped for more preventative measures as it relates to bias related incidents as well as long term aftercare for the trauma they may experience during their time at the institution.

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Grace Maxon-Clarke

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Committee Member

Karen Fabrizio, EdD

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the Black and Latiné college student voices yet to be heard. Thank you to my family for encouraging me to have a thirst for knowledge and your continued unconditional support in achieving my dreams; and my son, Max, for inspiring me to be my best every day. Thank you to Syracuse's Cohort 9 and my team, Cloud 9 (Emery, LaToya, and Kim) for being my stability and support throughout this educational journey. I am so grateful for the lasting friendships that have come from this experience together. Thank you to my dissertation committee, mentors, and support throughout this process. My chair(s) Dr. Theresa Pulos and Dr. Cathleen Dotterer and committee member(s) Dr. Sharon Archer and Dr. Karen Fabrizio, executive mentors, Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner, Dr. Kathleen Kerr, Dr. Jessica Harris, and campus mentor, Dr. Debbie Furlong, for your support throughout this process. Without your dedicated support, guidance, kindness, and patience this research would not be possible.

Biographical Sketch

Mrs. Grace Maxon-Clarke is a Senior Academic Planning Counselor for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at public 4-year university. Mrs. Grace Maxon-Clarke received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Justice in 2011 and her Master of Science degree in Mental Health Counseling in 2014, both from SUNY Oswego. In addition to working with students toward their growth and success, she is an active member of a variety of committees on campus advocating for equitable student resources and access. She came to St. John Fisher University in the summer of 2021 and began doctoral studies in the EdD program in Executive Leadership. Mrs. Maxon-Clarke's pursued her research of Black and Latiné college student perceptions of college leadership responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents under the direction of Dr. Cathleen Dotterer and Dr. Karen Fabrizio and received the EdD degree in 2023.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the first 3 months of 2020, the nation experienced the back-to-back murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. The subsequent protests sparked a national conversation about systemic racism and injustice (Kiles et al., 2021). As racially motivated hate crimes are increasing in the United States, there has been a parallel increase in college campus hate crimes (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). The relationship between these occurrences has influenced the need for societal institutions, like higher education, to respond to these issues. Institutions of higher education are at a critical point of examining what is happening in society (Tierney & Perkins, 2015). As public institutions are called to provide guidance for community responsibility, universities and colleges are faced with responding to issues related to racial trauma and mistreatment of the Black communities on their campuses (Mwangi et al., 2018).

According to the NCES (2019), "A hate crime is a criminal offense that is motivated, in whole or in part, by the perpetrator's bias against the victim(s) based on their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability" (p. 1). The NCES (2019) also reported that between 2011 and 2016, there was a 40% increase in campus hate crimes. The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1990 (Clery, 2018) requires postsecondary institutions to report hate crime incidents (Clery, 2018). According to the statistics compiled from the Clery Act, of the 757 hate crimes reported in 2019, 435 were motivated by race or ethnicity (Irwin et al., 2022). These hate-related incidents accounted for seven types of crimes: murder, sex offenses (forcible and non-forcible), robbery,

aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson (Irwin et al. 2022). The 2008 amendment of the Clery Act now includes four additional types of crimes: simple assault; larceny; intimidation; and destruction, damage, and vandalism (Irwin et al., 2022).

Nelson (2019) stated that the motivation behind these crimes had been largely due to racial bias. Carter (2006) described race-based incidences as racial harassment, hostility, racial discrimination, avoidance, discriminatory harassment, and aversive hostility. There have been a few studies to show that students experience racially biased acts on their campuses (Museus et al., 2015). These experiences on and off campus impact students' multifaceted well-being and, ultimately, they could impact students' sense of belonging on their campuses (Strayhorn, 2013). Sense of belonging for college students has been correlated with the retention of students in higher education (Davis et al., 2019).

Effective college responses and strategies toward supporting communities of color in the wake of these national hate crimes is an emerging field of study (Mwangi et al., 2018). Therefore, capturing students' perceptions of their college leaderships' responses to racially biased events provides feedback for campus leadership, such as presidents, vice presidents, provosts, deans, and department chairs, in their efforts to meet the needs of their stakeholders by understanding the student experience and improving upon that experience.

Problem Statement

With the increase in racially biased incidents in the nation (e.g., the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery), college leadership has responded to these incidents. Prior quantitative studies have covered student experiences on campus in large numbers, upwards of 1,000 or more (McCready et al., 2021). Previous qualitative research has conducted interviews and focus groups investigating the racially biased experiences of students

of color on campuses and their impact on the campus racial climate. Other studies have examined the analyses of texts published by campuses in responses to incidents around the world (Morton et al., 2020).

Many higher education institutions have made efforts to respond to these incidents (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015). Morton et al. (2021) examined a collection of responses by colleges to campus and community violence through public messages by way of email or social media. In 2022, Meikle and Morris highlighted some of the written responses by college presidents in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. While these efforts are noteworthy, Garcia and Johnston-Guerrero (2015) posited that leaders at higher education institutions need to explore how students are perceiving their colleges' responses to these incidents in an effort to ensure those institutions are meeting their student and stakeholders' needs and using best practices.

Theoretical Rationale

This study was guided by two distinct theories: institutional theory through the institutional response framework and critical race theory (CRT). This study begins with an explanation of the role of educational institutions regarding students' experiences. Through institutional theory, this study examined the processes and mechanisms by which structures, schemas, rules, and routines become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior (Scott, 2005). CRT was used to guide the research approach and methodology of this study through the underrepresented student participants' stories and voices.

Institutional theory helps to define the role that institutions play in social behaviors (Scott, 2005). Institutional theory was introduced in 1949 by Philip Selznick to understand organizations and management practices as the result of social pressures (Suddaby, 2013). The

"aim of Institutional Theory is to explain the stability and persistence of social (inter)action in specifically constructed contexts" (Clegg & Bailey, 2008, p. 684). Meyer and Rowan (1977) added to the theory that the day-to-day and the formal structures display and perpetuate the values of the institution and society in their own unique ways.

In institutional theory, institutions conform to attain social approval (isomorphism) and survive the competition by comparison to the rest of the field and societal expectations (Guth, 2016). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) introduced the idea of three institutionalized fields to help identify the external or isomorphic pressures to conform. Coercive isomorphism was identified as external pressures, mimetic isomorphism represents the pressures to copy others within the field to look normal, and normative isomorphism defines the way professionalization and networks engage (Guth, 2016). These three pressures can be identified and used as a guide when trying to understand the relationships and influences on higher education institutions. As we explore the decision making and influences regarding how college administrators respond to biased incidents, institutional theory's distinction between external and internal pressures provides a helpful outline.

Social movements, like Black Lives Matter, which had a surge of activity following the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor in 2020, can also have a significant impact on institutional behaviors (David et al., 2019). New theorists believe that social movements impact the social construction of the development of an institution's identity (David et al., 2019). This idea starts to take shape as it relates to higher education as well. As social movement actors promote the so-called right values, institutions decide how to respond and support the movement. By supporting the movement, they can accept certain societal norms through symbolic gestures (David et al., 2019).

Institutional theory helps address some of the perspectives that relate to the influences on leadership members (Scott, 2005), which can be applied to how they respond to biased incidents on their campuses. Institutional theory guides research to examine macro-level norms in society that surround the higher education culture (Guth, 2016). Institutional theory also requires research to understand how the internal culture of institutions perpetuates societal norms that influence potential change within organizations (Guth, 2016). Also, institutional theory sets the stage for understanding the decision-making process as well as the creating of a foundation for a new institutional response framework that pieces together institutions' responses to issues and how they are perceived by the stakeholders involved (Cho, 2018).

As previously discussed, these symbolic gestures are a way educational institutions can communicate their values and norms. However, Yang and Konrad (2011) discussed that these actions can sometimes be superficial, to show publicly conformity or abide by legal rule, and they are just merely placeholders for the issues at hand.

Most recently, institutional theory was adapted by Cho (2018) through a new institutional response framework. Institutional response framework uses institutional theory to provide a new perspective as students are seen as both actors and recipients of higher education (Cho, 2018). The application of the institutional response framework is an attempt to apply the process of relationship between higher education institutions and their students who are both the consumers/actors (Cho, 2018). The framework shows the importance of institutions recognizing the role students play as stakeholders to their institutions and the students expectation of the institutions to play a role in the way their society operates (Cho, 2018). This new adaptation connects institutional theory to this study.

CRT was coined by civil rights lawyers who wanted to bring awareness to the racial justice and the role White supremacy plays in the American legal system (Delgado, 2013). Over the years, CRT has developed to apply to other institutional environments such as education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT calls for the explicit use of narratives to expose the impact of discrimination and the power of the law used against persons of color and its influence on educational leadership and policy (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). CRT recognizes that American higher education has racism embedded in its structures, discourses, and policies that guide the daily practices of universities (Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Taylor, 1999). Most importantly, CRT centralizes the lived experiences of people of color through storytelling and narratives (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989; Parker & Villalpando 2007). As we look at the responsibilities of the institutions through institutional theory, we see that they are critical in meeting and shaping the needs of the community's trust that is established, and accountability is required. Using CRT to share an often-under-amplified voice is a critical way to share a needed perception and reality for decision making.

The basic CRT model consists of five elements summarized by Solórzano et al. (2000): "(a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective." (p. 63). These elements are supportive of this study's design to amplify the experiences of the marginalized voices of Black and Latiné student populations.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore student perceptions of college leadership responses to nationally known racially biased events. As institutional theory suggests,

6

institutions are looking to meet the needs of the campus community interests and concerns and they are looking to understand critical stakeholders' perspectives on this significant topic, and this is necessary (Guth, 2016). As research continues to develop in this area, this study highlights an area unexplored of Black and Latiné student perspectives. It is necessary for college leaders to understand the connection between student expectations, campus responses, and their impact on students' overall well-being and experience at their institutions. As campuses provide support for the development of our society's ideals and values, feedback from this study provides valuable understanding. This study provides college leadership with an opportunity to understand specifically how Black and Latiné college students perceive the college leaderships' responses as they relate to nationally known, racially biased crimes.

Research Questions

To gain an understanding of Black and Latiné college students' experiences and perspectives, this research used the following questions to guide this study:

1. What are Black and Latiné college students' expectations of their college leaderships' responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents?

2. What are Black and Latiné college students' perceptions of their college leaderships' responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents?

The answers to these questions provide unique insight into the experiences of the primary stakeholders in a higher education institution.

Significance of Study

Studies related to racially biased incidents, campus racial climate, and student experiences were accomplished with a large student demographic or small private institutions

(McCready et al., 2021). Few studies have focused on the mid-level populated, public college demographic. This demographic is reflective among many statewide higher-education systems.

The results of this study provide campus leadership with the stakeholders' perspectives while bringing attention to the voices of Black and Latiné students. This study provides guidance for campus leadership by providing supportive responses for their campus community during critical times through the eyes of the Black and Latiné student population. Cabrera et al. (2016) made it clear that experiencing campus prejudice and intolerance on college campuses can lessen students' commitment to their institution and, ultimately, they influence students' decision to leave their campuses. The findings of this study can contribute to the understanding of Black and Latiné students' points of views, and also provide insight for campus leadership in their decision-making for creating an inclusive and responsive community. Research shows that marginalized students' experiences on their campus and the perceived campus racial climate are factors that relate to student persistence in college (Strayhorn, 2013).

With the recent increase in nationally known, racially biased incidents, Black and Latiné college students are impacted by these events. As campuses respond to these events, there is a need to explore how students are perceiving their college leaderships' responses to these incidents in an effort to ensure that campus leaders are meeting the stakeholders needs and using best practices. The potential impacts of this study include the opportunity for college administrators to learn the Black and Latiné student perspectives as they relate to the college leadership efforts in responding to nationally known, racially biased incidents like the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor.

Definitions of Terms

Campus racial climate – educational institutions' environment regarding race or ethnic prejudice tolerance and overall experience for marginalized populations.

College leadership – educational institutions' presidential cabinet including the president, vice presidents, deans, department chairs, and directors.

Latiné – gender-neutral alternative to Latina or Latino.

Nationally known, racially biased incidents – countrywide publicized crimes influenced by racial bias.

Chapter Summary

This study helps to inform the gap of knowledge regarding student perceptions of campus responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents. Chapter 1 provided a background and context for the research problem, a review of the relevant literature, and a proposed research design methodology to find answers to the research questions. This research provides feedback for campus leaderships to make informed decisions relating to their response strategies and goal of creating an inclusive and responsive community.

Chapters 2 provides the context and significance of the issues framed through recent literature reviews of studies related to campus racial climate, student retention, and campus leadership. Chapter 3 reviews the use of a descriptive, phenomenological research design that used focus groups to share unique experiences and narratives to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 reviews the research questions as they related to the results from the focus groups conducted. The results are a detailed data analysis and summary of the findings, and Chapter 5 covers the implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, the emerging recommendations from this study, and the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

The literature and scholarly work surrounding this topic begins with understanding student experiences on campus as it relates to the campus racial climate. The current literature has explored the impact of the national resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the campus experiences, and the extension of campus experiences with social media online. The literature shows that the student experiences with race-based incidents and the discrimination of students of color are linked to their overall mental health, physical health, and subsequent college retention. Finally, the literature reviews the most recent research around the institutional role and college administrative responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents and how students, faculty, and staff have responded to those actions.

Campus Racial Climate

Campus racial climate is a recurring phrase in the literature that was best described by Lewis and Shah (2021) as they paraphrased Hurtado's (1992) pioneering work on campus climate. Lewis and Shah (2021) shared that campus racial climate makes a difference in students' experience on their campuses. The literature review gives the overall student experiences with the influences of Black Lives Matter; local campus responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents; and the important role social media plays for students who are experiencing their world through screens.

Black Lives Matter Movement

Studies, such as Yao and Rutt's (2021) study, shed light on the impact that the national climate has on students' campus experiences as it pertains to race. During the start of 2020 there were three back-to-back nationally known murders of Black Americans named George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Their murders were shared on national social media sites during a time when many people were in front of their screens and homebound as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are a variety of studies that highlight how the experiences happening nationally can impact student experiences on their campuses. Students in the Mwangi et al. (2018) qualitative study of 25 semi-structured interviews echoed that the national racial climate was a clear reflection of issues in the students' personal lives and on their campus communities. Mwangi et al. (2018) provided leading research that investigated at how Black students contextualize campus racial climate within the broader racial climate of U.S. higher education and society. Mwangi et al. emphasized that there can be direct experiences for students and indirect or vicarious experiences that students might be facing by way of the media or by hearing. Both experiences play a role in students' feelings of safety and belongingness (Mwangi et al., 2018). The Mwangi et al. study helps to show that the relationship between the world outside of campus and campus culture is connected when it comes to students' lived experiences.

Lipscomb's (2019) phenomenological qualitative study of 62 Black males also looked at the indirect and vicarious experiences. Lipscomb's (2019) qualitative study interviewed Black males who had secondary experience with either hearing, reading, or viewing a fatal shooting of a Black man named Stephon Clark by the local police department. The study addressed the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that can come from watching fatal and disturbing experiences.

The Black men interviewed in the Lipscomb study said that although they did not know Stephon Clark, after witnessing the shooting through shared media, they, themselves, experienced anger and sadness, hypervigilance, avoidance, and dissociation. The experiences off campus made a difference in their lived experiences on campus (Lipscomb, 2019).

Kiles et al. (2021) supported Lipscomb's (2019) research. The Kiles et al. study had 25 Black participants who were 4th-year pharmacy doctoral students, and they shared in focus groups that vicarious trauma, like the unjust killing of Black men as seen on the national news, can be viewed as a reminder that the same incident could happen to anyone—a family member, a friend, or themselves. The participants in the Kiles et al. study shared that they had felt a personal connection to the tragedy because of the commonality of being Black. Each attack on a Black community member was an attack on them, their family, and their existence. The Kiles et al. (2021) study is another example of the impacts of national events feeling personal— particularly for students of color.

Lastly, Davis and Harris (2015) conducted a document analysis and agreed that there is a negative campus culture that is a symptom of historical and societal issues relating to racism. Campus cultures do not operate in a bubble. Students on campus experience the world around them while simultaneously attending classes, creating a difficult job for campus leaders to address national issues that impact students' experiences (Davis & Harris, 2015). Students must address their own safety and security on campus and around them as well as process what is happening in the world outside of the campus.

Racially Biased Incidents

As these national events took over social media in a new way, research on the experiences of marginalized students of color over the last 30 years are not new. A dominant

theme that has emerged is students' experiences of microaggressions. "Microaggressions are subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 60). The Solórzano et al. (2000) study used the critical race framework to examine how racial climate impacts the undergraduate experiences of African American students through racial microaggressions. Solórzano et al. hosted 10 focus groups for 34 students to share their experiences and found that students felt "invisible" in the classroom and diminished by nonverbal microaggressions. The Solórzano et al. study showed that the effects of microaggressions and negative racial climate experiences on campus can create feelings of self-doubt, frustration, and isolation for students who experience them. The effects of microaggressions are prevalent in the lived experiences of students of color. Even the most accomplished students of color have shared that the experiences and feelings they have are under the surface, but they cope with them on a regular basis (Solórzano et al., 2000).

There are contrasting views on how truly "micro" microaggressions can be. Garcia and Johnston-Guerrero (2015) used content analysis and studied 205 news-making incidents to understand covert versus overt forms of racism. They studied the difference between blatant racism and subtle microaggressions and determined that these two terms and experiences are forms of racism, and they have deep, pervasive roots in racism. In the Garcia and Johnston-Guerrero (2016) study, they determined that the microaggressions had just as much impact as blatant racism. The Mwangi et al. (2018) noted that micro- (and macro-) aggressions, rather than overt racism, are what influences the contemporary campus racial climate. Garcia and Johnston-Guerrero (2016) believed that these racial actions, unintentional or not, are still offensive and are received as insults and invalidations.

Allen's (2018) study was a qualitative interpretive approach that discussed the lived experiences of Black men at predominately White institutions (PWI)s and how they worked through poor racial campus climates. The men interviewed for the study demonstrated perseverance and determination by code switching, repositioning against deficit views of Black men, or by responding directly to the university racial climate. This was both conscious and unconscious work being done by the participants in addition to the work they were accomplishing as college students. Allen (2018) maintained that the development of social capital and skills are critical in college experience and beyond, and Allen also argued that this necessary social capital is learned and developed by way of relationships with peers, faculty, and staff.

Important relationships for students of color were highlighted in the McCready et al. (2021) quantitative study of 692 of predominately private college students, and the study supports a similar notion that one way for a student to have a positive sense of belonging at a university is by developing relationships and interacting with the faculty and staff of such university (McCready et al., 2021). On a smaller scale, the Palmer et al. (2011) qualitative study, with five students, also highlighted students of color in STEM programs that wished that the programs fostered a sense of community among faculty, students, alumni, and professionals. The Palmer et al. (2011) study went further to discuss that students felt as though the campus administrative efforts to deconstruct the campus climate of intimidation was necessary to help with fostering a sense of community. The pressures and environment where the students' confidence and abilities were challenged became an issue for the students and their overall sense of belonging within the STEM program and with campus experience. The Palmer et al. (2011) study emphasized the impact of campus leadership on the student-of-color experiences on their

campus. This influence has started to emerge as an important focus for student-of-color experiences.

Historically, Hurtado (1992) studied the context for racial conflict and tensions on campus. Hurtado used comparative institutional data that may help identify contexts for racial conflict. With data from a 4-year longitudinal study, Hurtado used a follow-up survey with 21 variables measured (Hurtado, 1992). The dependent variable of campus racial tension was confirmed to use the scale-of-perception of racial tension. Only 12% of surveyed students said racial discrimination was not a problem in America. The perception of race relations on campus varied among the different racial groups; 25% of the students on campus perceived considerable racial conflict (Hurtado, 1992). Students at both public and private universities were more likely to report a lack of trust between minority student groups and administrators (Hurtado, 1992). Black students were more critical of their environments than the other student groups. This was important to note early on in this study because many studies that followed captured the same data (Hurtado, 1992). Students of color perceived relatively higher levels of racial tension and lower levels of institutional commitment to diversity at their institutions. However, students perceived a low racial tension at institutions with high student-centered priorities (Hurtado, 1992). Racial tensions may rise in environments where there is a lack of concern for students (Hurtado, 1992). Student-centered priorities on campus were predictors of perceptions of low racial tension. Students' perception of their campus leaderships' influences impacted their students' understanding of their campuses' racial climate (Hurtado, 1992). This insight could help shape future studies around the impact of student-centered priorities, satisfaction, and retention.

Finally, Yao and Rutt (2021) brought to light a similar experience for international students of color. The 19 international students were interviewed to share their experiences of a racial incident on campus at a PWI and its influence on the students' perception of the campus climate. Their perception was similar to that of the domestic students of color. Yao and Rutt's phenomenological, narrative inquiry approach highlighted that the international students shared they were concerned about racism before they even arrived on campus (Yao & Rutt 2021). The study started to explore the other variables that can play a role in students' expectations of campus climate. The international students were worried about the national climate because of the presidential administration at the time (Yao & Rutt 2021). International students shared that they were worried about campus safety and how the institution might respond to issues of campus unrest or racism (Yao & Rutt, 2021). Being far from home, international students had to rely on the institution's response and support as well as have a secure ability to stay connected with family during difficult times (Yao & Rutt, 2021). Finally, Yao and Rutt (2021) discussed that when incidents of race, racism, and nativism occur on campus, campus leadership should pay attention to the international students of colors and their intersecting identities and experiences.

Online Experience

One of the reasons why the experiences and lines are blurred for students on campus is the use of social media. According to Mwangi et al. (2018) social media connects students to the world outside of campus and the world around them on campus. As the literature looks at the experiences of students on campus, social media is a prevalent factor to students' awareness and connection to the world around them and their campus. McCready et al. (2021) discussed that before students arrive on campus, they are using social media to investigate and prepare for the

campus climate they are about to join (McCready et al., 2021). Social media research is emerging and unique as many of the previous studies were, they did not contend with the same variable. McCready recommended that as research continues to develop, there is a need to consider the impacts of social media as an influence on students' experiences, campus climate, and community.

When the students are connected with campus culture, social media can have positive and negative effects. The McCready et al. (2021) study explored the impact of online discrimination and its direct effect on the mental health of students of color. As more students of color were experiencing racialized aggressions on social media there was a positive association with mental health issues (McCready et al., 2021). McCready et al. encouraged campuses to be vigilant and proactive in supporting students in both the physical and campus environments where racialized expressions are an unfortunate part of the community.

In contrast, Hotchkins (2018) performed a qualitative study with 12 interviews that discussed how technology is used to help the campus racial climate become tangible. Student activists use what was termed the "digital underground" to communicate, develop allies, and find safety in anonymity (Hotchkins, 2018). In the study, social media and technology were used to build a supportive community that encouraged and nurtured peers and connected with transgenerational elders (Hotchkins, 2018). Students reported that technology was used to educate as well as amplify injustices that might have been concealed before. Student experiences were no longer isolated and in silos, but they were part of a larger experience (Hotchkins, 2018).

In summary, the campus racial climate encompasses a few factors including student experiences relating to microaggressions and racially biased incidents; the students' intimate and relative experience with the world around them; and the deepened connections to the world, each

other, and their campus through social media. These studies highlight connections as well as an extension of what/where campus culture begins and takes place.

Impacts of Racially Biased Incidents

Student experiences regarding biased incidents can be difficult to understand in their entirety. Aside from the issues with underreporting, the emerging literature is overwhelming when concluding that students who experience racially biased aggressions may suffer psychological-, physiological- and health-related impacts (Britt-Spells, 2018). These impacts can, in turn, influence their success in school and ultimately their retention and degree completion (Johnson et al., 2014). The following literature supports these concerns concerning the impacts of racially biased incidences on students of color.

Mental Health

There are studies that can tie experiences of racially biased incidents to one's mental health. The meta-analysis by Britt-Spells (2018) encompassed 14 articles that helped solidify that depression experiences by Black men (one of the leading causes of disability) can be linked to Black men's experience with the discrimination that they face. Britt-Spells recognized that there were not as many studies looking at the experiences of Black men and the impact discrimination played in their depression. Britt Spell's meta-analysis shows there is a significant relationship between discrimination and an increase in depressive symptoms among Black men.

Campbell et al. (2019) briefly discussed the experiences of racial discrimination, decreased feelings of comfort, and increased feelings of threat. The Campell et al. quantitative study was comprised of 352 students who were surveyed twice in a year. Similarly, a quantitative study by Lipson et al. (2018) included a large sample size of 43,375 participants with over 13,000 students of color from a variety of different backgrounds. Campbell et al.'s

2019) study showed a direct link between Arab Americans with results showing the highest prevalence of mental health problems that were directly linked to discrimination and financial issues, as well as the lowest level of knowledge of resources. These two studies are data rich and show the relationship between mental health decline when discrimination is prevalent (Campbell et al., 2019; Lipson et al., 2018).

Polanco-Roman et al. (2019) wanted to know if traumatic stress and depressive symptoms could help explain the relationship between racial/ethnic discrimination and suicidal ideation across racial groups. In their quantitative study, 1,344 participants were recruited from a larger national study. The participants were predominately female (72%) and racially diverse (46%). Unlike other studies reviewed, the study had a stronger female representation. Polanco-Roman et al. (2019) measured the participants' racial/ethnic discrimination, trauma, depression, and suicidal behaviors. Their work resulted in 20% of participants reporting some suicidal ideation in the past year but there were no racial differences in traumatic stress, depressive symptoms, or frequency of suicidal ideation. As may be expected, there were significant discrimination differences for racial groups. The Pearson correlation analysis showed significant positive correlation between racial discrimination and traumatic stress ($r = .25$), depressive symptoms, ($r = 0.17$) and suicidal ideation ($r = 0.09$). Ultimately, Polanco-Roman et al. concluded that experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination may contribute to suicide risk, however, little is known about the potential mechanisms underlying this relationship. Polanco-Roman et al. (2019) also noted that the study focused on individual forms of racism/discrimination and not institutional, which is an area that could be expanded on.

Previously mentioned, students of color also experience the world around them and not just related to them directly. Kiles et al. (2021) explored racial empathy as it related to the impact

of experiences that are not direct but still impactful. Participants witnessing acts of racial violence reported feelings of hyperawareness, the urge to fight or flight, vicarious trauma, and personalization of violence. The study solidified the need for campus administrators to understand the experiences of students' need for support systems for Black students to sustain their wellness and success (Kiles et al., 2021). Additionally, Museus et al. (2015) highlighted in their qualitative study of 22 interviews that mixed-race student participants who responded to experiences of prejudice and discrimination with avoidance strategies could also jeopardize their own emotion and psychosocial health.

The McCready et al. (2021) study supported that experiencing racism and discrimination on campus has adverse effects on mental health and can contribute to racial battle fatigue. McCready et al. shared that there is a great deal of focus on the negative impacts but not a lot of focus on the positive impacts of their ethnicity. McCready's study found that the on-campus encounters are not as significant as the encounters online (McCready et al. 2021). This is a new perspective that adds to the understanding of student experiences as it relates to their mental health and experiences on campus. Although previous research expressed a correlation between the two, McCready et al. was able to show that the impact was not as important for incidences on campus as it was for online experiences with racial microaggressions. Additionally, they uncovered that ethnic identity could be positively associated with a sense of belonging, campus interactions, and encounters with racism (McCready et al., 2021).

Physical Health

Torres-Harding et al. (2020) went a step further in their quantitative study of 467 participants to uncover that it is not psychological but somatic, and physiological issues related to microaggressions are also present in the Black community. Contrary to previous studies, some

participants showed more prevalent somatic issues and less mental health symptoms. Additionally, different microaggressions caused different outcomes and effects (Torres-Harding et al., 2020). This revelation introduced the impact of intersectionality on how racially biased experiences like microaggressions can impact people differently (Torres-Harding et al., 2020).

Much like the Kiles et al. (2021) study with Black pharmacology doctoral students, participants in the Mwangi et al. (2018) study saw themselves reflected in the murders of Black men and women. They vicariously experienced their own anxiety about what could happen next to them or their loved ones (Mwangi et al., 2018). Participants in the Kiles et al. (2021) study stated they felt anxious and guarded as well as having a heightened sense of awareness and increased alertness and distrust (Kiles et al., 2019). The Kiles et al. (2021) study highlighted the stress on internal health implications for hypertension as well. As a result, participants reported turning to medication and self-medication to deal with anxiety to try and numb experiences and overwhelming feelings (Kiles et al. 2019). Additionally, participants reported isolating and withdrawing from both physical and social media networks that felt toxic or overwhelming (Kiles et al., 2019).

For Kiles et al. (2019), some of their own criticism included understanding the uniqueness a university setting could have on variables not considered. These studies criticized themselves in that their work was based predominantly on self-reporting as well as difficulty addressing the side variety of variables that could influence a student's experience. Variables, including prior mental health, familial support, coping strategies, socioeconomic status, and more, could be important to account for in future studies and measures.

These studies are varied in nature but ultimately link together in agreement racially biased aggressions—whether they are direct, vicarious, microaggressions, or to the level of

crimes—and they have significant impact on communities of color. Garcia and Johnston-Guerrero's (2016) study emphasized that the consequences of racially biased incidences are deep and pervasive and should not be ignored. Direct and indirect experiences make students feel unwelcome, unwanted, and they have significant impact on their mental and physical health (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

Retention and Sense of Belonging

There are several studies that correlate students poor experiences on their campuses with poor retention and decreased degree completion rates. It was believed by Kiles et al. (2021) that racial trauma has implications for student wellness and, subsequently, their academic success. Over the years, researchers have tried to measure and study this element in different ways.

In 1999, Cabrera et al. examined the role that perceptions of prejudice and discrimination played within the adjustment to college processes of African American and White students. Using the Nation Study of Student Learning data from 18 national institutions, 1,454 students were surveyed. The study showed that there were no differences observed in perceptions of prejudice and discrimination between White and African American students; however, the African American students were slightly less likely to report positive experiences (Cabrera et al, 1999). There were similar levels of support from families and friends and satisfaction with the college experience. Additionally, there was no difference in academic preparedness between the African American and White students, which was another indicator of retention and success. Cabrera et al. (1999) concluded that successful adjustment to college does not need to include cutting ties with family and that students of color are not the only groups susceptible to discriminatory perceptions. The Cabrera et al. study showed that perceptions of prejudice have the second largest impact on White students' goal commitments, and for African American

students, it influenced their social experience. Exposure to prejudiced campus climate was the dominant influence on the African American students' commitment to the universities. Another important effect noted was that the support and encouragement from family played a role in supporting African American students' persistence (Cabrera et al., 1999).

Museus et al. (2008) examined the relationship between campus racial climates and baccalaureate degree completion. The study was a 6-year longitudinal study that included three rounds of interviews (Museus et al., 2008). The response rate was 88% with over 8,492 participants in total (Museus et al., 2008). The standard deviation shows that White students (.89) were most satisfied with campus racial climate while Black students (.80) were least satisfied (Museus et al., 2008). The social involvement and perceived racial climate were negatively correlated for Latiné and White students (–.06). Museus et al. (2008) believed that this may be because the more involved a student was, the more aware they were of negative aspects of campus racial climate. Museus et al. (2008) determined that perceived racial climate was the most powerful predictor of institutional commitment for all four groups. The Museus et al. study supports previous studies by Hurtado (1992) that students from different racial climates perceive and react differently to campus racial climate. Museus et al. (2008) were able to prove that the campus racial climate exhibited indirect effects on persistence and completion. Museus et al. (2008) also noted that traditional models of student departure are inadequate for explaining persistence and degree completion among students of color (Museus et al., 2008).

Johnson et al. (2014) conducted another quantitative study with 1,837 participants to understand how campus environment perceptions and experiences contributed to the persistence of students of color. Campus environment (positive or negative) contributes to the psychological experience for students of color during their first year (Johnson et al., 2014). This impact on their

psychological experience showed an impact on their persistence decisions (Johnson et al., 2014). This was an important perspective to understand when looking at retention and persistence, which is measured from Year 1 to Year 2 (Johnson et al., 2014). As an additional note, Johnson et al. (2014) was able to show that racial and ethnic diversity on campus is beneficial to White students' social experiences and ultimate persistence. This demonstrates the need for and importance of having a diverse study body for the benefit of all students.

The Campbell et al. (2019) study highlighted the importance of not equating success with satisfaction. As mentioned in Solórzano et al. (2000), despite accomplishments and completion and/or success, students of color's satisfaction and overall experience with the campus racial climate is still troubling. Campbell et al. shared that understanding a student's perception of self-worth and peace of mind are just as important for the student's experience as grade point average success and college completion (Campbell et al., 2019).

Finally, Mwangi et al. (2021) shared that although students of color face racial prejudice and discrimination, students of color continue to find ways to positively connect with their communities, and they persist. Whether it be through social media, protests, affinity groups or other resources, and campus community partnerships, many students of color had feelings of empowerment when faced with the challenges of racial discrimination and discomfort on their campuses (Mwangi et al. 2021).

Role of the Institution and College Responses

Campbell et al. (2019) shared the challenges colleges face in ensuring equality of opportunity while addressing social inequities from the history of the educational institution. As institutional theory suggests, colleges are increasingly pressured by social concerns. Similarly, Garcia and Johnston-Guerrero (2016) stated "colleges should increase their responsibility for

educating students with critical consciousness and civic responsibility because the consequences of racially biased incidents are deep, pervasive and should not be ignored" (p. 60). Colleges are looked to for a response by the many stakeholders that make up the college community (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2016). There have been a few ways colleges have responded including bias response teams, public statements, hiring of chief diversity officers, and workshops (Meikle & Morris, 2022). Emerging research is now investigating how the faculty and students are responding to these diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts by college administrators (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

The role of higher education institutions in civic engagement and discourse is evolving. As recent as October 2023, a large public institution released a statement stating that "An essential purpose of higher education is to foster civil discourse and provide students with the passion and tools to increase civic engagement," (The State University of New York [SUNY], 2023, para. 2) The system's top leader stated that it is the role of higher education to take the lead on crafting and supporting the community to work through societal concerns critically and empathetically (SUNY, 2023) The same higher education system committed to a 25-point DEI action plan in 2021 (SUNY, 2021a). Within this plan the system puts, front and center, the importance of racial equity and its intersection with higher education and the system's role in addressing racial injustices (SUNY, 2021b).

Davis and Harris's (2015) research showed how race-related issues remain undocumented until negative media coverage and protests occur. There is often hesitancy by the university to acknowledge wrongdoing and focus on wrongful intentions and not the impact. It seems common practice to distance the university from the wrongdoing and also not putting the wrongdoing on anyone else (Davis & Harris, 2015). David and Harris (2015) compiled common

responses and statements made by campus administration. The common themes that emerged were color blindness, interest convergence to benefit the White and silent, and an acknowledgement of undocumented responses unless media had highlighted the issue. Campuses seemed unthreatened until their reputations were threatened by media exposure. Davis and Harris (2015) found there was damage done by just focusing on the intentions of the action and not on the impact.

Davis and Harris's (2015) study found the need for action-oriented work in response to these issues that arise at universities and colleges. Like the Mwangi et al. (2018) work, Davis and Harris (2015) believed it is important for universities to address the pervasiveness of these issues and not to treat them like isolated events and that the lack of a systems approach to addressing these issues is a failure of the college responses. Davis and Harris (2015) recommended qualitative storytelling of student experiences through intergroup dialogue as being beneficial to understanding these unique and important experiences.

Morton et al. (2021) examined the crafted responses from 32 different campus leaders regarding the violence at Charlottesville to determine leadership was provided to the communities during the time of crisis. Of the 81 institutions canvassed, 31 institutions provided position statements, compared to written correspondence, and the institutions' mission statements, values, or diversity statements (Morton et al., 2021). Morton et al. (2021) used the Q&A Miner qualitative data analysis software to search for similarities and differences. Descriptive and axial coding was used to determine major codes. The primary codes that emerged were a "call to action," at 72%, stating that hope and kindness would make a change (Morton et al., 2021). Although these statements told a story of empathy, many lacked mentions of previous work done (18%) to combat racism or a specific plan moving forward to solve the

issues addressed in the statements. Additionally, 69% referenced Charlottesville specifically, 75% restated their community values, and 69% of those value statements were verbatim (Morton et al., 2021)

The secondary themes that emerged from Morton et al. (2021) were first amendment rights (47%), reassure community (44%), solidarity (41%), and no place for hatred (41%). Most of the messages were sent 5 days or less after the incident while some waited for the beginning of the next semester to send a statement (Morton et al., 2021)

Most recently, Meikle and Morris (2022) examined university presidents' implicit and explicit social justice responses to George Floyd's death and the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. They reviewed the discourse available such as mission statements, presidential statements, and strategic plans (Meikle & Morris, 2022). Of the 62 statements from 34 public institutions and 28 private institutions, the most-often mentioned items were systemic racism, racial inequities, strong condemnation of the murder of George Floyd, resist violence and protest peacefully, strong commitment to social justice, community service, DEI, call to action and mission statements (Meikle & Morris, 2022). There were varied levels of commitment to social justice and challenging systemic racism. Some were stronger than others in social justice and anti-racist narratives (Meikle & Morris, 2022).

Lewis and Shah (2021) showed that colleges were engaging in diversity, inclusion, and equity work to help right past wrongs and help with retention. But how did students interpret and make meaning of this? Colleges were hosting curricular diversity sessions, cocurricular diversity sessions, intergroup dialogues, and workshops and courses promoting multiculturalism. However, Lewis and Shah (2021) found that interest convergence came back as a reason why colleges feel the need to respond in the interest of the White population. Their study highlighted

the need for more than statements from the colleges but a need for intentional, structural change, and a capacity building that responds to needs and skills structures, and adding resources to the institutions' concerns would show investment in what matters to the students. Ultimately, their study showed that the diversity work was centered on Whiteness and surface-level diversity but no inclusion (Lewis & Shah, 2021).

Faculty Responses to College Leadership Actions

Griffin et al. (2019) offered a unique perspective from the professionals who are tasked with responding to race-related student activism. The 12 chief diversity officers (CDOs) interviewed explored the personal commitments and connections they must have to do their work. The CDOs described that clarifying their roles for all stakeholders and themselves was important (Griffin et al., 2019). There was an importance of appearing impartial to the institutional leaders. They recognized the need to engage with social media for the students as well as create space for processing and activism, particularly after an event or attack happened (Griffin et al., 2019). The CDOs shared that their role in responding to various stakeholders about student activism was not easy and required that they were always aware of the professional power dynamics at play within their institution, and that they were aware of the structural racism that impacted their work (Griffin et al., 2019). The CDOs also highlighted that they were aware that part of their role was to interpret the needs of the students to the stakeholders and administrators, but they were also to interpret the work being done from the administration to the students (Griffin et al., 2019). Students were impatient at times with level of responsiveness or rate of change, and holding space for their frustration was important (Griffin et al., 2019).

Miller et al. (2018) wanted to understand the theory and practice of bias-response in higher education through the administrators' perspectives on a bias-response team. With 21

participants, Miller et al. interviewed the staff to get their experiences. There were two emerging themes that included guiding philosophies, like institutional value and response practices, such as punitive approaches, public relations, and education awareness. The administrators shared that the bias-response teams were much like a balancing act between the theory and practice of bias-response in higher education. Much like Griffin et al. (2019), Miller et al. felt as if the roles were being held accountable by two groups—the administration and the students (Miller et al. 2018). The administrators pointedly said that they felt as if they were "treating the symptom not the disease" in their roles (Miller et al. 2018). Finally, the administrators mentioned the lack of professional support and legislation. Without these tools, there was not a guidepost or network available to help in decision-making, consistency, or best practices (Miller et al. 2018).

LePeau et al. (2018) had a similar response. The 16 participants in their study identified factors that could hinder the bias-response team's ability to combat systems of oppression and to initiate transformative change. Through this process, the researchers did consensual qualitative coding and coding that required the questioning of each of the researchers' interpretations to ensure credibility and dependability. The researchers also implemented a triangulation approach to ensure credibility. Colleagues in the LePeau et al. study agreed that supporting each other helped in their commitment to their perception of social justice, and it was a symbolic form of capital. The strength of this work included providing bias-response team members with multiple vantage points on an issue or multiple points of contact with students and other university stakeholders. Level of trust was critical in this work to process together, share sensitive information, and support one another (LePeau et al., 2018).

Student Responses to College Leadership Actions

Other researchers mentioned the need for understanding the student voices in these experiences. Kiles et al. (2021) stated:

Future research should investigate Black student perceptions of equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives and incorporation of their feedback and recommendations. Institutions should be cognizant that Black students are paying attention to what they say in response to sociopolitical unrest and are making judgements accordingly. (p. 6)

This was a common theme that resonated through many of the articles reviewed, not just from the student perspectives but from all angles of the research. It seems to be that for decades the research has pointed to the students for the answers and for the response, but the research is just now showing progress in this area (Morton et al., 2021).

Reynolds and Mayweather (2017) set out to explore the antecedents and consequences of racial tensions at one predominately White Midwestern university. From their set of nine individual interviews, what they found was that culturally competent faculty were absent in the struggle. Students perceived the lack of care from faculty and administrators as an indication that the students did not matter (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017). The students highlighted that just hiring more people of color might not be the solution, but they shared that all hires should be interviewed through a social justice lens. The continued professional development for cultural competency would also be a positive step in the right direction. From this study, Reynolds and Mayweather (2017) concluded that when student voices are heard, it is then that administrators can meet their needs. Campus climates can only improve if the actual experiences are understood.

Soon after the Reynolds and Mayweather (2017) study, the Mwangi et al. (2018) research raised the voices of the student participants who shared that systematic racism was reflected in U.S. higher education, and the institutions can act as agents in the social reproduction of inequality and can be agents for positive social change. Students shared that they wanted their peers, faculty, and administrators to acknowledge the role that the university played in reifying racial inequality. Students shared that they are looking for accountability, action, and acknowledgement of their campuses' own role in the injustices that exist in their institutions (Mwangi et al., 2018). As administrators craft and plan for responses to these acts, these data are important to hear from the students themselves.

Lewis and Shah (2021) researched how Black students interpret and make meaning of the DEI initiatives at their PWI. Through a qualitative set of focus groups with 30 participants, they found that the students believed that the work being done seemed to be surface-level diversity, and there was little to no inclusion. The work that was being done was Whiteness-centered diversity and inclusion, and lastly, regardless of the work being done, there was still a sense of not belonging (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Students were frustrated and aware of what felt like a quota system when campuses were asked about diversity. They felt like the numbers associated with diversity were more to appease stakeholders rather than legitimately promote the importance of diversity and inclusion work (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Students felt as though the campuses were working on diversity and inclusion efforts because of the pressure from student activists' demands, and the colleges did not want to genuinely make a change in the systemic issues they were referencing (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Students felt tokenized but not appreciated elsewhere. Finally, the students shared that they felt the work being done was centered in White privilege and White comfort and that the actions taken by campuses were done to appease the White

campus members to feel better about their diversity work—without making changes that helped

students who struggled with racism on campus (Lewis & Shah, 2021).

On the contrary, the Mwangi et al. (2021) participants brought a different perspective.

Despite the negative experiences they faced, the student participants believed that the race-

related incidents on campus were a catalyst and helped open space for important dialogue. In

several studies, students and participants, alike, shared that these experiences motivated students

of color to make a change in their community (Mwangi et al., 2021). Experiencing these negative

incidents empowered students to act and engage as change agents. Similarly, the literature

highlights how, if the responses are not what the students are hoping for or favor, protests and

increased activism by the student body is a popular response (Mwangi et al., 2021).

Summary

Exploring this research topic uncovered three important areas of study that include

student experiences with campus racial climate, impacts of race-based incidents and

discrimination on students of color, and college leadership responses to nationally known,

racially biased incidences. The literature examined how public institutions, such as universities

and colleges, are responding to issues relating to racial trauma and mistreatment of the Black

communities on their campuses. These issues show great reason for attention and response to

better serving the communities of color on our college campuses.

The literature explored the impacts campus racial climate has on student experiences. The

students reported that their lives reflected the national turbulence around race relations. The

influence of social media exposing the world around them is also a variable to their experiences

that cannot be ignored. The importance of their experiences is reflected in the literature

surrounding the mental and even physical impacts a student might have as it relates to their

experience with racially biased experiences. In turn, many studies suggested that these negative experiences and impacts play a role in students' sense of belonging on campus and their retention/degree completion.

The literature also revealed that campuses are responding. Although the responses are seen as surface level with statements (Lewis & Shaw, 2021), many campuses have implemented bias-response teams and chief diversity officers to help with these issues (Miller et al., 2018). Emerging literature is uncovering how students perceive those responses by their college campuses, and how they can guide the ways campuses address racially biased incidences, thus impact their students (Meikle and Morris, 2022).

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Higher education institutions, such as universities and colleges, are faced with the responsibility to respond to racially biased incidents that have significant impacts on their students' lived experiences. This study aimed to answer the research questions:

1. What are Black and Latiné college students' expectations of their campus leadership's responses to nationally known, racially bias incidents?

2. What are Black and Latiné college students' perceptions of their campus leadership's responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents?"

This study used a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design via focus groups to provide students at a mid-sized institution with the opportunity to share their expectations and perspectives regarding their college leadership's responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents. With a foundation in both institutional and critical race theories, this study provides a unique stakeholder's perspective that is currently missing from the literature.

Research Design

Descriptive phenomenology is used to study and explore the lived experiences of individuals (Krueger & Casey, 2000). This study used a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological design using focus groups to investigate the perspectives of students as they experienced their college's responses to racially biased incidents.

Using CRT as a basis for this study, focus groups provided a tool that gave a voice to a community that is not currently, nor systematically, represented in the conversations around

these issues on campus. By using focus groups, the participants could work together to express their shared experiences (Carey et al., 2012). The CRT model provided support for the opportunity for the students to share their unique experiences through storytelling in a communal setting found in the focus groups.

At the time of this study, the researcher had acquired a professional background in higher education, working predominantly with students of color at a PWI within the state system where this research was conducted. The researcher had experience participating as a committee member on a Bias Prevention Response Team, as well as training in restorative practice, which provided necessary preparation to approach this research neutrally. To address any influence of potential bias, the researcher used reflexive bracketing with journaling before, during, and after the focus groups. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to acknowledge and set aside any bias that would arise as the participants shared their experiences. After the transcriptions were member checked, the researcher also had additional readers of the transcripts to eliminate the potential of influence of bias in her interpretation.

Research Context

This study was conducted at a public, 4-year, higher education institution in the Northeast United States. The institution is part of a larger state-run system, with 64 campuses, and of the total student body, non-White students make up 47% of the population; 14.5% identified as Hispanic/Latino and 10.3% identified as Black/African American (SUNY, 2022). The higher education institution selected was a residential college with a mid-sized campus of 7,000–10,000 students. At the time of this study, the selected school had a student demographic that encompassed a broad, diverse student population. In parallel with the state-wide numbers, this institution reported that non-White students made up 32% of the population; 12.5% of the

students identified as Hispanic/Latino, and 10.3% of the students identified as Black/African American (SUNY, 2022).

The public institution has been tasked with upholding the mission and values related to the influence of state-run, publicly funded institutions. The mission of the system selected was to:

Provide educational services of the highest quality, with the broadest possible access, fully representative of all segments of the population in a complete range of academic, professional, and vocational postsecondary programs including such additional activities in pursuit of these objectives as are necessary or customary. (SUNY, 2022, para. 1)

The leadership of the institutional system consists of a board of trustees, a chancellor, system administration, and campus presidents. Collectively, they work to establish the collective mission, vision, and values of the state-run and state-funded institution (SUNY, 2022).

Following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmad Arbery, the institution selected for this study sent out a campus email addressing the tragic loss of these individuals and expressing solidarity with the community finding for social justice and peace. Additionally, the institution hosted virtual healing circles, increased counseling opportunities, virtual panels to address racism, and displayed a "Black Lives Matter" banner on campus as well as a painted "Black Lives Matter" statement on campus property.

Understanding the unique perspective of these students is important for the leadership because the students represent a large part of the student body that the campus leadership serves. This research can help campus leadership members understand the students' experiences and perspectives as they relate to the campus leadership's responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents.

Research Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to identify this study's participants. Creswell (2013) described that purposeful sampling is when the researcher reflects on the "who" that is being sampled. Purposeful sampling is a technique used to select individuals or groups of knowledgeable individuals who have experienced a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

In line with the CRT's focus on marginalized voices, the participants were self-identified Black and Latiné students enrolled at the selected university. The students recruited were juniors, seniors, or who had graduate class standing at the time of the study. The students were enrolled in this public, 4-year college during the time of the George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor's murders during the 2019–2020 academic year. The purposeful sampling helped to select students who experienced the phenomenon of knowing of these nationally covered murders and who had witnessed their college leadership's responses to these incidents.

With the support of the campus' Institutional Research and Assessment Office, the researcher was provided with a list of all eligible students who met the designated criteria for this study:

1. College students enrolled in a public school of 7,000–10,000 students.
2. Current junior/senior/5th-year students
3. Students who identify as Black/African American and/or Latiné.
4. Students who attended the college during the 2020–2021 school year.

The original list had 281 names. Over the course of 3 weeks, the researcher contacted participants from the list via email. Once students responded with interest in participating in the focus groups, the researcher asked each student to review and complete the informed consent

form. Once the participants completed the informed consent form, they were given the option to participate in the study online or in-person.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The method used for this research was focus groups. Using focus groups works particularly well to determine the "perceptions, feelings and thinking of people about issues, products and services, or opportunities" (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 8). Given the context of this study and the specific population, focus groups provided a better environment for the members of this vulnerable population who might not be heard as well with other methods, like surveys (Carey et al., 2012). Focus groups are supported by researchers for a variety of reasons. Focus groups allow participants to have the social orientation awareness to be more natural in their responses as they would in life, and their social support networks would be more natural and honest than each participant having a one-on-one interview (Marshall et al., 2022). Focus groups also provide information that is readily understood and believable because of the ability for participants to share freely how they experience a phenomenon (Marshall et al., 2022).

Three focus groups with three to four participants was conducted. In total, there were 11 participants represented across the three focus groups. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested that given the complexity of the issue, a smaller group of no more than 10 participants is appropriate compared to the larger 10–12 participants in a market research study. Given the sensitive nature of the discussion for these groups, small focus groups were conducted to provide a communal, but intimate, setting for the participants to share their experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Focus groups are also known for their reliability as they present a more natural environment than that of an individual interview because participants influence and are influenced by others, just as they are in real life (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The idea is that the

focus groups provide an opportunity for the participants to share an intimate lived experience they had and to discuss the phenomenon together, which is the goal of descriptive phenomenology, and it is a great opportunity to provide feedback for institutions to hear from their student stakeholders.

Through this study and the use of these focus groups, the goal was to gain insight into the attitudes and beliefs of the students who experienced the phenomenon after the nationally covered murders. Like interviews, focus groups provide unique context and perspective as they relate to how participants can make meaning of their experiences at their colleges and university communities—particularly in a time of possible cultural divide and racial strife (Carey et al., 2012). As the focus group structure was developed, designing the questions was a critical step for the focus group interviews, and they were carefully predetermined (Krueger & Casey, 2000). As the questions were developed, as Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested, they were phrased and sequenced so they were easy to understand and logical to the participants. Using a common generational language is important when communicating within focus groups and interpreting what the participants are sharing. Most of the focus questions were open ended and developed with reflection on the previous research relating to student experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The questions that were used during the focus group are listed in Appendix A.

Procedures Used for Data Collection

The qualitative data were from three small focus groups. The pseudonyms provided by the researcher were "Participant" followed by a number. Focus Group 1 included Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3 on Zoom. Focus Group 2 was conducted in person and included Participant 4, Participant 5, Participant 6, and Participant 7. The third and final Focus Group 3 was completed on Zoom and included Participant 8, Participant 9, Participant 10, and Participant

11. There were 11 participants in total, all who met the defined criteria set by the study. The students who participated online were asked to keep their cameras off, and they used the pseudonyms provided by the researcher. The participants who were in-person were asked not to introduce themselves, and they were asked to keep confidential what was shared in the group confidential.

During the focus groups, the designed questions were given to each participant. The research questions helped guide the purpose for each question. Questions 1 through 8 addressed Research Question1 by asking about students' awareness regarding the nationally known, racially biased incidents and what their expectations were of the college leadership's responses to those events. Questions 9 and 10 were directed at Research Question 2 by asking the students to share their perspectives of the college leadership's responses to the nationally known, racially biased incidents.

Procedures Used for Data Analysis

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), part of the process of meaning making is the detailed, analytic techniques when reviewing the interview transcripts. The focus groups were audio recorded and an online transcription tool was used to help transcribe the statements made during the focus groups. The transcripts were then sent to the participants for member checking and all members approved their statements. This process helped validate that their statements were accurately captured and ready for coding (Saldaña, 2021).

The researcher completed an initial read through of the transcripts to get a general sense of the data. Open-ended coding was used to develop themes and categories and to see if there was a sense of the phenomenon emerging (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The initial, open-ended coding in vivo was used for the first cycle of coding. From there, the researcher reread each

transcript and began to identify themes and categories to identify a potential phenomenon. During this process, the researcher used memos during the focus groups and notes throughout the process of coding the transcripts to capture the emerging themes and categories. The memos provided the opportunity for the researcher to reflect on the coding and the thought processes behind the codes that emerged (Saldaña, 2021). The in vivo process provided enriching the context and developing reliable codes that emerged in relation to the theories used in this study. When the most prominent codes emerged, they were then put into categories around the questions and themes for this study. After this process, the data were reviewed with the dissertation committee as additional experts.

Summary

To better understand the complexity of students' responses to colleges and their response to nationally known, racially biased incidents, this qualitative, phenomenological study conducting strategic focus groups gave a voice to the Black and Latiné student population. Centered on the values found in CRT, this study used focus groups to collect responses from underrepresented students who experienced the phenomenon being research through the act of storytelling, a prominent method of expression for minoritized communities. Through open-ended coding, critical codes emerged to develop themes and address the research questions presented.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore Black and Latiné college student expectations and perspectives on their campus leadership's responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents. The aim of this research was to share the perspective of Black and Latiné students impacted by these events and have the expectations and perspectives provide guidance for campus leaderships to improve efforts to support students during these traumatic times. This study provides campuses with student feedback related to campus responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents. The research questions that were determined to help address this study are:

1. What are Black and Latiné students' expectations regarding their campus leaderships' responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents?

2. What are Black and Latiné students' perceptions of their campus leaderships' responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents?

Data Analysis and Findings

Using the two research questions, the data collected from the focus groups revealed two themes and seven categories for Research Question 1. Research Question 2 resulted in three themes and 11 categories. Using direct participant quotes there is now a deeper understanding of their expectations and perspectives regarding the campus' response to the nationally known, racially biased incidents.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was answered in a variety of ways in the focus groups. The themes and categories that emerged across all focus groups included (a) no expectation: first-year student, COVID restrictions, PWI and (b) expectations met and expected different: met needs of white majority, public institution, expected more, expected different.

Table 4.1

Research Question 1 Themes and Categories

Theme	Categories
No Expectation	First-year student
	COVID restrictions
	PWI
Expectations Met	Met needs of White majority
Expected Different	Public institution
	Expected more
	Expected different

Note. PWI = predominantly White institution.

No Expectation. The no expectation theme was broken into three categories. The participants expressed that they did not have expectations for the institution because: It was their first year in college, they were experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, and, lastly, that the college was a PWI.

First-Year Student. The participants shared that during the time of the nationally known murders, they were going into their first year of college. They had limited expectations regarding the college's responses because of the lack of college exposure and experience.

In Focus Group 1, Participant 3 stated, "I think that's when I was first starting college. Also, I'm just entering my freshman year and I expected . . . because it's a PWI . . . I expected to be a minority there."

In Focus Group 3, Participant 10 stated, "It was my first year, so I was coming up into school, to a PWI, during a time where a lot of stuff was being trivialized."

COVID Restrictions. Similarly, the students reflected on the fact that the COVID pandemic had an influence on their experience during this time and it ultimately influenced their expectations. The pandemic created a situation where they were isolated in homes or residence halls, and they were primarily online with limited opportunities for in-person events and activities.

Participant 1 stated, "I can say that I personally wasn't disappointed. I didn't expect more from the school because, again, it was during COVID; they can only do so much." Participant 11 stated, "I feel like the pandemic also played a part in it." Participant 1 stated:

> I heard about the murders of Floyd, Taylor, and Arbery from Facebook because it was after we had to leave campus [for COVID]. I was just stuck on a loop of just staying on the Internet, and I saw it on Facebook first, and any other space. (P1)

Participant 3 shared:

> I heard about it on, like, the media, like social media, and the news during that time. A lot of us were locked in because of COVID and everything. So, we saw lots of the protest and . . . we were kind of trapped with it because that's all we would hear on the news.

PWI. The students shared that attending a campus that was considered a PWI shaped the expectations they had with the college's responses. They expected that the college would focus on satisfying and meeting the needs of the White majority student base.

In Focus Group 1, Participant 2 stated, "It's just that I wasn't really expecting the school to do much because one, it's a PWI."

In Focus Group 2, Participant 6 stated: "I didn't know what to expect... it's a PWI campus."

In Focus Group 2, Participant 7 stated: "I think, also, negative, because, you know, being a person of color at this PWI . . . made me look at the staff differently."

Expectations Met. The participants also shared that some of their expectations were met. These expectations were met in two categories: expectations that the White majority's needs would be met, and that the institution was bound to a certain response as a public institution.

Met Needs of White Majority. The students expressed the expectations that the college was going to target their responses to meet the needs of the White majority over the minority student needs.

In Focus Group 1, Participant 2 stated, "They're going to favor their majority over the minority, as always."

In Focus Group 2, Participant 6 stated: "I don't know what to expect from them besides them trying to satisfy their majority. They just want to give us What we want quote, unquote, just so they could keep getting our application money."

In Focus Group 2, Participant 7 stated, "I don't know what I expected them to do because I just know, I feel like no matter how much they can be there for you, it's just not the same, like you– you really don't know or you can't really understand what's going on. . . . I just wasn't expecting them to do more."

Public Institution. The students shared their expectation that as a part of the public system, the college would be influenced to respond in a certain manner. Some participants felt

the nature of a public school that was connected to a larger system would have limits to their response to avoid being controversial.

In Focus Group 1, Participant 1 stated:

I did have faith in the institution . . . advocating in the best way possible during the time, because I was aware that we are a public school, so we can't say as much as we want because we're under the SUNY system. (P1)

Participant 1 then stated:

But I didn't expect more, and I know that's controversial or, like, I'm not expecting more. I just thought that we can only do so much with the school and their response because, again, they're a public area, [and] I felt like just having that or like the school making it known . . . what side they were on but more so their view on the situation. (P1)

Participant 1 went on to say,

The school did it perfectly where it wasn't overbearing but they said it enough that people were able to communicate about the situation. It is a public school so we can't do as much as we want to, but it was just enough. (P1)

Also, in Focus Group 1, Participant 2 shared that they felt this would make the campuses respond in a passive way: "They're going to be . . . to be passive in my opinion" given the context that the institution was a public institution.

Expected Different. Some participants shared that they expected more from the institution, or they expected a different response from the campus. This left the students feeling like their expectations were not met.

Expected More. In Focus Group 2, Participant 4 shared:

Personally, [I] believe they could have done more, like, I agree. I don't know what else

could have been done, but I feel like there could have been something else . . . to show

that there was some backup from the school. (P4)

Also, in Focus Group 2, Participant 5 shared: "They could have reached out to us more . . . they

could have had more counselors."

In reference to the college painting the Black Lives Matter road painting and signage, In

Focus Group 3, Participant 9 shared: "I wanted something more; I felt like everyone was doing

that."

Expected Different. The participants shared that they generally expected something

different from the college. They were hoping for more of a response, more follow-through, and

less passive statements.

In Focus Group 1, Participant 2 stated: "They're going to be passive in my opinion." In

Focus Group 2, Participant 7 shared:

I guess, I just wasn't expecting them to do more, but I feel like . . . just because you

acknowledge something one time doesn't mean that that's it. They [college

administration] send you a huge email saying nothing, and they go on with their day and,

no, that's not how you do things. (P7)

In Focus Group 2, Participant 5 shared:

To us and may seem like they're doing the bare minimum, but to them it might be, "oh,

we are doing the best we can." They could probably do everything that they can, but we

can never see it as enough. It's happening to us and not to them. (P5)

And, in Focus Group 3, Participant 8 stated: "When not all of Breonna Taylor's murderers got convicted . . . there was no email sent out about that, no support. No sign out about that, no healing circle options out about that, which I thought was interesting."

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was answered with the second series of questions that were asked in the focus groups. The themes and subsequent categories that emerged across all focus groups included the following (a) lack of trust: not genuine, trendy/performative, obligated, (b) predominately White community: lack of representation, silence of the White community, unsafe in the community, and (c) areas for improvement: educational options, support for affinity groups, increased diverse faculty/staff, improved marketing, and continued support and effort.

Table 4.2

Research Question 2 Themes and Categories

Theme	Categories
Lack of Trust	Not genuine
	Trendy/Performative
	Obligated
Predominantly White Community	Lack of Representation
	Silence of White community
	Unsafe in the community
Areas for Improvement	Educational options
	Support for affinity groups
	Increased diverse faculty/staff
	Improved marketing
	Continued support and effort
	Systemic issues unanswered

Lack of Trust. The participants across the groups had a distinct undertone that the actions taken by their campus did not feel genuine and seemed as if the campus was obligated and wanted to keep up with the trend. The participants reflected on how some of the actions taken could be seen as performative. Along with the concepts surrounding the Black Lives

Matter movement, the participants saw the actions taken at their campus as aligning with what was happening around the nation. The participants shared a common theme throughout the focus group sessions that included a lack of trust in the genuineness of the campus' actions, of their White peers, of the faculty, of the staff and community, and that of the local law enforcement.

Not Genuine. The participants shared they did not feel like the efforts being made were genuine and that the college administration was obligated to send the campus message out instead of doing so out of pure intentions. In Focus Group 2, Participant 6 stated:

They just want to give us "what we want" just so they could keep getting our application money and think I don't think they did anything for a real purpose of our healing—unless they did—and I just don't know where. I think it was more just so they could stay with the times and not look like a bad campus. (P6)

In Focus Group 3, Participant 11 stated: "It wasn't very genuine, and I think you know they could have done way better."

Also, in Focus Group 3, Participant 8 stated: "I don't want to show support for, like, show. That I supported something that I didn't believe was genuine if that makes sense." Participant 8 later stated, in reference to the college response to a nationwide outrage around George Floyd's murder, that the college's responses "never seemed genuine to me it seemed, like, it was out of obligation."

Trendy/Performative. The participants shared that the actions taken by the campus felt performative in some ways and that the actions were done because it was a societal trend spreading across America at that time. In Focus Group 1, Participant 1 agreed, "The painting on the road, which was very performative in my opinion." In Focus Group 2, Participant 6 said:

Can we even trust this is being done for the right purposes? Is it just to be trendy? Do

they really care about us or just their status or their financials? Help the school get more

support or the students more support? (P6)

In Focus Group 2, Participant 5 shared, "I didn't expect them to do more. I feel like

they're just, like with this topic, a lot of people just follow the trends because . . . I feel like

they're scared if they don't respond."

In Focus Group 2, Participant 5 reflected, "Yeah, I mean, I think they posted it on

Instagram, but like I said, it's a trend; they wanted something trendy, but a flag is not going to do

anything."

In Focus Group 3, Participant 8 stated:

I think they only acknowledged George Floyd because it was worldwide. It was a

worldwide incident. You could not turn on your TV without seeing coverage about that

murder and not to be that guy, but I truly think that it was out of obligation. (P8)

Participant 9 shared, "They did that in Washington. They were doing it everywhere. It

didn't really mean much." Participant 8 summarized their experience, "Yeah, like, we all said

before, it just feels it feels surface level." Participant 10 not only saw it as performative, but

recommended what could have been done in place. "Spray painting 'Black Lives Matter' outside

of the building, just seemed very performative." Participant 10 also stated: "I also especially

found it really performative, considering that there was a situation, I think, a year or 2 ago . . .

but the school didn't really do anything to address it."

Obligated. The participants shared that the actions of the campus leadership felt like it

was done out of obligation and not something that was done because the leadership genuinely

cared about their experiences. In Focus Group 2, Participant 7 said, "It didn't feel organic. It just

felt like, 'okay, we must do this, so let's just do it. So, they can say we are doing something.'" In Focus Group 3, Participant 11 stated, "Even the emails, too. They were very obligated to send them out. Otherwise, people would have called them out."

Predominately White Community. The representation of the leadership, those hosting the events and the counseling staff, made an impact on the students' expectations and perceptions of the events. Their perceived identities influenced the students' participation in the events as well. They shared that having people who can understand the experiences they were facing made a difference and, inversely, it was the same for people who did not understand their experiences and who were less likely to be the best support for the students at that time.

Lack of Representation. The lack of representation of faculty and staff of color hosting the events impacted the students' perceptions and they expressed feeling isolated in the events. In Focus Group 2, Participant 4 noted that it wasn't just the wrong move, but it possibly made the situation worse by having someone who did not meet their needs hosting the event. "I clearly remember it just because the Zoom calls were hosted by the wrong person. It was like putting fire on fire. It made no sense to me." Participant 4 also stated: "Minorities really only got themselves, especially depending on your location, and it sucks, because I feel like we don't have people on campus that we can, like, go to and feel like we're comfortable, like, to talk with." Also, in Focus Group 2, Participant 7 shared, "I feel like no matter how much they can be there for you, they is just not the same like you—you really don't know, or you can't really understand what's going on." In Focus Group 3, Participant 8 stated:

> I did see that, like, a lot of the people running the meetings were, you know, White
>
> professors or White mental health professionals. And I just don't think that's what we
>
> need. At the time, I think we needed someone that we could have relate to; someone who

felt the pain from the community, who understood it, who had experienced that kind of animosity themselves. I didn't feel the need to go, and I don't think it would have been healing for me. (P8)

Also, in Focus Group 3, Participant 10 shared:

What's the point? Especially after seeing that they were mostly led by White professors. There is a certain level of consciousness that comes from being a person of color, being a Black person, being able to speak to those experiences that a lot of times we were told that we're being over dramatic or crazy about. (P10)

Participant 11 said, "I feel like it wasn't a safe space, when you know it's being led by mostly White professors and stuff like that. That kind of triggered me a little bit."

Silence of White Community. The participants shared that the silence from their White peers made an impact on how they connected with the campus community. In Focus Group 1, Participant 1 talked about the silence from their White peers making an impact on how they felt.

I had, like, a couple of mutuals from . . . my residence hall that [I] was living in and also . . . classes who are White, I'm a had them on social media, and I just saw a lot of silence between them or nothing at all. . . . It just made me feel very weird.

I took off a couple of people, off of there, then when I came back on campus, I was more distant toward White people, not like in a weird way, but it was just more so, like, I felt no commonality between us because it just felt like, if anything were to happen, there will be silence again, and I just didn't feel that comfortable around. (P1)

Also, in Focus Group 1, Participant 3 echoed this experience:

I didn't make friends with . . . some White individuals. I also did notice that silence, where you would see more Black individuals talking about it. If I was going to talk about

52

it to my White friends, I noticed . . . there would be a silence afterwards or like the topic

would change immediately afterwards. I would say it doesn't affect them or they don't

think it affects them directly, so they don't feel the need to talk about it. (P3)

Unsafe in the Community. The participants shared a common feeling of not being safe in

the community. In Focus Group 2, Participant 6 shared:

Especially when we experience some of the things that go on in this town, just, you

know, being a predominantly White town. Nobody wants to be the next victim and when

there's tension, like that going on, and there's eyes, only because you're a minority. You

don't know what to expect, you don't know who's aiming at you. You don't know who's

planning on you. You don't know if you could even take a walk and be safe because you

know no matter what you do, you look like a threat or you appear as a threat, even if

you're not, then you see all of those, "Blue Lives Matter" around town and then the small

little "Black Lives Matter" on two buildings. (P6)

Also, in Focus Group 2, Participant 4 shared they lost trust:

I started not trusting any cop that was around, especially campus police. They put some

sort of fear in me that any little thing I do will result in some sort of interaction with

them, and I don't trust it. (P4)

Participant 7 thought something different of the staff they were around:

I think, also, negative, because, you know, being a person of color in this PWI also just

made me look at the staff differently, how they react to things, and it just made me

question who can you really trust? Like who's really here for you? (P7)

In Focus Group 3, Participant 10 stated:

I feel like it, even though it wasn't the intention of those sessions. It kind of created like a

cesspool and [an] opportunity for non-Black students and for White students to kind of

come in and be really condescending about what was being discussed, give their opinions

on stuff that they don't really know about. It would also try to have Black students call

into question their experiences that we know to be true, and it just didn't seem like a very

conducive and welcoming space to me. (P10)

As the participants reflected on safe spaces, in Focus Group 3, Participant 8 spoke on not trusting that the spaces were really a place for them to heal but more of a place for others to learn.

I just wanted to say, but I feel like, another reason is when Black people and people are in

inner spaces like that, where there are typically a lot of White people, I feel like we often

end up doing the educating in that situation. I feel like if I had shown up, I would have

maybe talked about my experience and or just would have ended up in me having to

teach other people something. I feel like that happens often when we enter spaces like

that. (P8)

Areas for Improvement. The participants shared that there were a number of areas of improvement they could identify. Through educational options, support for affinity groups, increased diverse faculty/staff, improved marketing, continued support and effort, and systemic issues unanswered, the participants identified a wide variety of ways the college could improve their efforts to address the social issues at hand.

Educational Options. The participants shared a variety of educational options to help educate others about their experiences as minoritized individuals who experience racism to develop empathy and understanding with their peers. In Focus Group 1, Participant 3 stated:

I feel like one thing they could have added was, like, some type of workshop. Things like,

microaggressions and stuff like that. I felt like there should have been some type of . . .

education on these issues instead of just . . . a healing circle or like writing Black Lives

Matter. (P3)

In Focus Group 2, Participant 6 stated:

Introducing a course that teaches us about these kinds of things, something on modern

issues and how to understand them, you know, how to follow accurate news. How to

speak about them, because a lot of people just were just saying things ignorantly just

because they haven't experienced what we experienced this, you know, at the end of the

day, a lot of people on this campus were not oppressed, you know? They just don't

understand. And as hard as it is to say, they can never understand. But with a course, they

could try to understand better. (P6)

In Focus Group 3, Participant 10 stated:

I feel like it's so important to bring up intersectionality as much as we can. . . . I feel like,

if anything, as a PWI, [it] also could have acknowledged its place . . . and perpetuating

White supremacy sometimes, and reinforcing racism to its students, sometimes, and other

forms of bigotry, and a smaller, more conservative town. (P10)

Support for Affinity Group. The participants shared that they wanted to see more

sustained and reciprocated support for the student affinity groups on campus. In Focus Group 1,

Participant 1 stated:

I started to hang out around people who were more similar to me, racially, or ethnically

or culturally. I just felt more comfortable hanging around people who are more like me

and took away that mindset of that I'd just have to engage with or become very close

friends with people who are just completely different than me. I found out there's a

reason why you should be near people who were like you. (P1)

In Focus Group 2, Participant 6 stated:

This is just like a personal feeling because, at the end of the day, I will never know what I

feel. Sometimes the school uses minorities as a way to seem more inclusive and diverse.

But for the resources, when we need them, where are they? You know, it feels good . . .

when they reach out to us sometimes, you know? It shows that we are important to the

campus, but when it's time for us to reach out to them for something, how come that . . .

gratitude isn't reciprocated? You know, it's not. I'm not saying that because we did this

for you, you should do this for us, but this, as a professional organization, as a college

campus, I think that . . . you should always [be] doing something—especially if they have

done a lot of work for you. (P6)

Also, in Focus Group 2, Participant 4 said, "Yeah, like there may be resources available

but it's like those resources don't tend to us and for us; it just doesn't like to click, doesn't make

sense." Participant 7 stated: "You know, like these student orgs are basically doing everything

for themselves, and they just love to come and support. I came to this, I was there, but not really

supporting and not doing anything."

In Focus Group 3, Participant 8 stated:

I don't think they realize that you actually have to put in the work. You can't just say it

and expect people to be like, "Oh, wow! This campus is so welcoming and supportive of

communities." It's just not the case. You have got to put your money where your mouth

is. You have to support the students, protect your students. (P8)

Increased Diverse Faculty and Staff. The participants shared their desperate need for more representation of minoritized faculty and staff on campus, providing multiple outlets and connection points for students. In Focus Group 2, Participant 7 stated:

> I feel like we need more diversity in the staff. We always talk about that, like, the school needs more diversity and staff, but they come, and they just don't stay, and that's what they're looking for. Why don't they stay, why are they flocking? Why are they leaving? I feel like they need to get to that, to the root of that, because it's a PWI with the students, and with the staff, we need a balance. (P7)

Also, in Focus Group 2, Participant 4 shared their experiences with staff and faculty that did not understand their culture and they felt like microaggressions when they occur. "I feel like just the teachers and staff. That's really irking me. 'Cus, like, I like to change my hair a lot. Like, I feel like they don't know about like, they say things and don't understand the culture."

More Marketing. The participants shared that more marketing of the support and response strategies would have benefited them and encouraged them to attend. In Focus Group 1, Participant 4 shared, "Also, the email sent was like a regular president's email, so, everything was like little lettering, and, at this time and age, you have to put a picture or something for attention." In Focus Group 2, Participant 6 stated:

> I think the marketing for that [the healing sessions] was pretty poor. They might have introduced it just to say they did something. But there was no execution because all of us are heavily involved with organizations. We, of all people, would have heard of it—not first—but at least second or at least, third, with something like that. (P6)

Also, in Focus Group 2, Participant 7 stated, "I don't think I knew about that, and the way the orgs advertise their social, they like their social events and stuff. They should have advertised like that because we definitely would have seen something."

Continued Support and Effort. The participants shared that they wanted to see the support that was shared in the initial months to be extended beyond the days following the incident. They also expressed there was still a need, years later, for support for students of color. In Focus Group 2, Participant 4 said:

> Any, like, long-term help that they have offered us? Because that's all done already. The school moved on from that. . . Some sort of, like, place where we can discuss, if there was a more continuous thing where, like, we can have it once a month or every now and then or something like that, that would have gave us more of, like, understanding that there are people in the school who are listening and taking notes to what we were saying. (P4)

Participant 4 was also proud to share their participation in a college-led program that provided a space they were previously looking for.

> They have these meetings; we have every Tuesday in which we just literally talk about what we're talking about now. But all this gets reflected back into the, like, administration on the workers of the school and . . . the diversity inclusion office. They make it really safe and really comfortable for all of us to speak and be confident. So, I'll give the school that one thing, for starting that and starting these . . . weekly meetings because I'm super comfortable with those meetings. (P4)

Participant 6 said, "I have mixed feelings about it. On [the] one hand, I appreciate the effort to raise awareness. They could have done that and then continued it on during the school year." Participant 7 said,

> For those that missed it, they could have done it when school started up again but, yeah, they didn't. . . . They did the circle and it's, like, yeah, it's been years, but people still have trauma, and it's just gotten worse since, I feel like. (P7)

Systemic Issues Unanswered. The participants shared that the initiatives, which were offered, did not help the systematic issues that perpetuated the violence and systemic racism that occurred. In Focus Group 1, Participant 2 asked the administration, "What are you doing to make sure that the students feel comfortable?" and "Thank you for stepping up, showing how you feel for us, but what are you doing in the process?" In Focus Group 2, Participant 5 put the spotlight on generational trauma that could be the culprit to the lack of trust that students were feeling, by stating, "It always feels like an ulterior motive—I feel like it shows generational trauma . . . being passed down. . . . I feel like we sometimes don't understand like how deep it runs."

In Focus Group 3, Participant 10 stated, "It was just kind of, like, a hot topic and not like a serious systemic issue that's been happening all the time." Participant 8 explained:

> I think it's a nice gesture. I don't really think it goes much deeper than that. It's easy to do that. It's easy to paint those words. It's the actions that you take. If you mean it or not is what really matters. And from what I'm seeing, all these issues [are] not being taken care of. Students getting harassed by university police that were employed by the campus. (P8)

Also, in Focus Group 3, Participant 10 exclaimed:

> Thanks for putting that [Black Live Matters sign] there, but, like, what are [your]
> promises, for lack of a better term, without acting on them? Like, people can say "Black
> lives matter" all they want to, but if the school, as a whole, as a collective, is not making
> a collective effort to . . . denounce stuff that opposes the very concept of Black lives
> matter and what it stands for, then I feel like it's just there for show. (P10)

Summary of Results

The purpose of this study was to explore Black and Latiné college student expectations and perspectives on a college campus leadership's response to nationally known, racially biased incidents. Qualitative data collected from a series of three focus groups were used to address the research questions.

Both research questions were addressed through the descriptive qualitative data discovered in this study. The themes and categories that emerged across all focus groups regarding student expectations were (a) no expectation: first-year student, COVID restrictions, PWI; (b) expectations met: met needs of White majority, public institution; and (c) expected different: expected more and expected different. The themes and categories that emerged regarding the student perspectives included (a) lack of trust: not genuine, trendy/performative, and obligated; (b) predominately White community: lack of representation, silence of the White community, and unsafe in the community; (c) systematic issues unanswered; and (d) areas for improvement: educational options, support for affinity groups, increased diverse faculty/staff, improved marketing, and continued support and effort. These themes explored the untold experiences of the Black and Latiné college students of one SUNY location during this turbulent time.

In Chapter 5, there is a final interpretation of the findings of the focus groups as well as the limitations, implications for leadership, and recommendations for future policymakers and practitioners.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Many higher education institutions have made efforts to respond to racially biased incidents that are nationally known. There is little known about how Black and Latiné college students perceive their college leaderships' responses to these incidents in an effort to ensure that their stakeholders' needs are met and they use best practices (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

Through this research, we gained an understanding of Black and Latiné college students' experiences and perspectives by answering two research questions:

1. What are Black and Latiné students' expectations regarding their campus leaderships' responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents?

2. What are Black and Latiné students' perceptions of their campus leaderships' responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents?

Chapter 5 covers the implication of the findings of this study, the limitations of this study, the recommendations for leadership, and the final conclusion of this study.

Implications of Findings

This study reveals the expectations and perceptions of Black and Latiné students regarding their college leadership's responses to three nationally known, racially biased incidents. The themes and categories that emerged across all focus groups regarding Black and Latiné student expectations were (a) no expectation: first-year student, COVID restrictions, PWI; (b) expectations met: met needs of White majority and public institution; and (c) expected

different: expected more and expected different. The themes and categories that emerged regarding the student perspectives included (a) lack of trust: not genuine, trendy/performative, obligated; (b) predominantly White community: lack of representation, silence of the white community, and unsafe in the community; and (c) areas for improvement: educational options, support for affinity groups, increased diverse faculty/staff, systematic issues unanswered, improved marketing, and continued support and effort.

The students' expectations regarding the college's PWI identity supports institutional theory and how institutions play a role in social behaviors. The student stakeholders recognized the role the institution played and saw the direct influence of both society on the institution and the institution's response to the society. The participants immediately tied their expectations to the institution's status as a PWI. This provided a context for the participants to expect that either nothing would be done or what was done would meet the White majority's needs that fit within the structures of a public institution. Some participants expressed that they wanted more, or different, recognizing that the institution's actions were symbolic gestures of societal norms. They had hoped for more support and action toward systematic changes.

The participants' expectations were also aligned with CRT, because marginalized populations recognize the influence of White supremacy on the identity and operations of higher education. The participants' expectations were shaped and molded by years of institutional racism and distrust. The expectations were low or not met. Although the participants were new to the college environment, they had preconceived ideas about what a PWI or college institution would do in the face of societal injustices.

The students' perceptions of the response from college leadership were also influenced by their experiences at the institution as well as their knowledge of what is happening around the

world. The students' perceptions were in direct alignment with institutional theory regarding the way institutions' norms reflect societal norms. The students' lack of trust with different segments of society influenced their trust in the university. The frustration of the White silence and feelings of being unsafe were not just outside or just inside the walls of the university but something they experience in all spaces. The students saw a need for systematic changes that were not changing. They saw the symbolic or performative actions that took place, which were intended to convey norms and values, but they did not trust or believe the actions were genuine because of centuries of generational trauma. As actors and recipients of higher education, the participants saw the institution as a potential vehicle that could do better in educating others about each other's experiences and support those who have experienced or were experiencing perpetuating traumas.

Using the participants' narratives highlights the need for students to feel like their experiences and perceptions are being heard and valued. The students spoke of mistrust, feeling unsafe, the need for systemic change, and areas of improvement they saw as vital to their experiences in higher education. With the feedback from participants, institutions can hold themselves accountable for the work they are doing, and will continue to do, to meet the needs of the entire student population.

Most of the findings agreed and were aligned with the standing literature. Like the Lewis and Shah (2021) study, there is a need for more action rather than general statements of support. There is a need for intentional structural change and a need for intentional actions that will show there is an investment in changing the systemic issues that are necessary to address and reduce racially biased incidents in our communities.

The final implications include the emergence of some of the participants' awareness of and sympathy toward the SUNY system because of the systematic pressures the college's leadership is up against in meeting the needs of the students but also responding to the nationally known violent acts of discrimination. Although this systematic pressure is written and known about to institutional theory scholars, such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983), having the student stakeholder population look at the system from their viewpoint was powerful.

This perspective should be noted for campus leaders to recognize the students' ability to see themselves as part of a bigger system, which is influenced by many forces.

Limitations

This study's limitations include key timeline factors that influenced the findings. Considering the participants of this study were first-year students during the time of the focus of this study, 3 years had passed since they experienced the phenomenon. This provided an opportunity for reflection, but it also does not capture an in-the-moment reflection of the phenomenon.

The COVID pandemic has ultimately altered both the student experiences as well as the institution's ability to provide a variety of support. COVID created a stronger online presence and less opportunities to host in-person events on campus. The students were also exposed to more information via email and online forums that seemed to come up in their feeds regarding how they were overwhelmed with everything online during this time. This is not a limitation of conducting the study itself, but it is recognized as an influence on the phenomenon.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research include in-depth individual interviews with student leaders, similar focus groups with Black and Latiné faculty and staff as important stakeholders,

as well as a focus group with college administrators and boards of trustees. This would provide a unique view of colleges' responses through different lenses. These studies could provide insight on the influence of institutional theory by way of narrative research.

The participants provided several helpful recommendations for future responses by the college administration. In the wake of the tragedies, recommendations for organizational practice and policy included involving student leaders in decisions regarding response strategies, providing long-term counseling and resources for students experiencing trauma, increasing Black and Latiné faculty and staff as resources for students on campus, and providing additional support for affinity groups on campus. Additionally, recognizing the importance of who was hosting the events, activities, and safe spaces was critical to the students receiving these spaces well. This could be done by including other students who are willing to support the mission and work.

Reviewing the experiences shared by the Black and Latiné college student participants, it is clear that practice and policies can be improved. Colleges not only need to work on response strategies but provide better preventative measures for their own campuses to be prepared to talk about the lived experiences of others. The students were clear that there is hesitation regarding their experience at PWI campuses before even going to the school as first-year students. This was shown through their expectations going into their first year of college. This hesitation and lack of trust can impact the experience and ultimately the retention of students who feel that lack of trust.

Campuses should consider looking at this experience as an area for improvement to acknowledge the identity of the institution and the strategies being used to overcome the issues that mistrust might create. Campuses can work on strengthening relationships between campuses

and the surrounding communities they are in. They can offer support and provide town hall discussions on issues in the community as well as conduct listening circles regarding the concerns of safety of the community members of color.

Campuses can increase the Black and Latiné faculty and staff and provide multiple outlets for support for students, faculty, and staff of color. Providing spaces for the increased faculty, students, and staff to share feedback on their experience on campuses and in the community should be built into their resources through mentorship, feedback session with administration, and yearly reports from the campus administration on the efforts made to improve the campus culture. Feedback loops and accountability structures are necessary for the community of color on campuses to feel like their experiences matter and that there is work being done to improve their experiences and quality of life.

By providing year-round support for students experiencing traumatic events, and for when they are ready to process these experiences either in groups or individually, the resources would be accessible when the students were ready. These actions would show awareness and support for the Black and Latiné population on campuses and provide a foundation for a more inclusive environment for all.

Conclusion

In the year 2020, the nation experienced the traumatic murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor during a time in which the world was at a standstill in the COVID-19 pandemic. National conversations around race and race relations blanketed communities including the higher education communities. Black and Latiné college students looked to the colleges they attended as a gauge for how these murders would be addressed. As college leaders

look to improve the experiences of their students, understanding their perceptions regarding their responses is a valued perspective for the students and administrators.

A review of the research literature shows that the experiences of students on their campuses, as it relates to the racial climate, can have a significant impact on their persistence in college (Kiles, 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018). Previous research has examined how the colleges responded, but the research was lacking the student perspectives of those responses.

The purpose of this study was to understand Black and Latiné college students' expectations and perspectives on college campus leaderships' responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents. Through this study, college leadership can improve efforts to support students through traumatic experiences. This study can provide campuses with student feedback relating to campus responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents through the phenomenological qualitative focus groups. The focus groups captured the student expectations and perceptions of their college leadership's responses to the nationally known, racially biased incidents. The study's findings address the research questions:

1. What are Black and Latiné students' expectations regarding their campus leaderships' responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents?

2. What are Black and Latiné students' perceptions of their campus leaderships' responses to nationally known, racially biased incidents?

The expectations and perceptions were captured through focus groups. A series of three focus groups with 11 participants in total provided their unique experiences.

The study included some limitations centered around the timing of the study. Given the phenomenon that happened during the COVID pandemic could have influenced the college response as well as the student awareness of the efforts. Also, the fact that the phenomenon

happened 3 years prior to this research adds to some complications in the participants' memory and processing of the event. Lastly, this study was conducted at just one public institution. It would be advantageous to continue this study at other institutions to compare the experiences of this study's students as well as look at the experiences of students of color at private and Jesuit institutions to see if the responses aligned or were varied.

The findings from this study provide insight into the experiences of Black and Latiné students as it relates to one college's response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. This insight can help college administrators understand the perspectives that Black and Latiné students have prior to attending their institution, particularly if it is a PWI. Recognizing the limited expectations, the lack of trust students have for the campus/community, and reviewing suggestions made by the students are important perspectives for college leaderships to take into consideration as they continue to strive to meet the needs of their students and ultimately support the persistence of all students.

Recommendations for policy and practice that emerged from this study include building a general feedback system for students to have the opportunity to share this valuable feedback throughout their time at their university. By building this in, students will feel like their voice is valued and heard. Other recommendations include development of a required course for all students about lived experiences of the oppressed as well as the impacts of microaggressions and the trauma experienced in the historical and daily lives of marginalized communities. Another recommendation would be to not only increase Black and Latiné faculty and staff but to provide the necessary support for them as they navigate a predominately White community. Additionally, providing both preventative and long-term support by relatable, diverse faculty and staff for

students experiencing trauma is suggested to help students in both the moment and also later on when they may feel ready to receive the support and services.

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Appendix

Focus Group Questions

1. During the first 6 months of 2020, the world was made aware of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. Do you remember hearing of these events?

   If yes, can you explain how you heard about them?

2. Did these events have an impact on your college experience?

   Can you explain why or why not?

3. What was the campus' response to those incidents?

4. What did you expect the campus to do in those situations?

5. Were you aware that the college hosted online healing circles following these events?

   If yes, did you attend why or why not?

6. Were you aware that the college hung up a "Black Lives Matter" Banner on the campus?

   If yes, what are your perspectives on this effort?

7. Were you aware that the college painted "Black Lives Matter" on a campus roadway?

   If yes, what are your perspectives on this effort?

8. What did you think of their response(s)?

9. Is there anything I didn't ask about your experience and reflection about nationally known, racially biased incidents and your college leadership response that you'd like to share?