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Building Inclusive Pedagogy: Recommendations From a National Study of Students of Color in Higher Education and Student Affairs Graduate Programs

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In this study, we share the racialized experiences of 29 students of color in higher education and student affairs graduate programs, focusing specifically on their relationships with faculty, their experiences in classrooms, and the strategies they recommend for inclusion. Participants indicated that they are expected to serve as the racial expert in classrooms and that many faculty fail to effectively facilitate discussions related to race and racism and to intervene in instances of racial microaggressions. Participants convey effective strategies to build racially-inclusive classrooms which include authenticity, vulnerability, and validation.

Graduate programs in Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) prepare professionals to work in co-curricular learning environments with students on college campuses. When graduate students experience racially inclusive practices in their HESA graduate programs, they are likely to continue those practices in their student affairs work, resulting in more racially inclusive campus environments. HESA graduate programs attract a variety of students and strive to recruit students of color to match the growing racial diversity of undergraduate students on college campuses (Taub & McEwen, 2006). As HESA graduate programs continue to enroll more diverse cohorts, faculty must be cognizant of varying learning styles, previous educational experiences, and social identities of students in their classrooms (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011). The field of HESA emphasizes inclusion, diversity, and social justice (American College Personnel Association &

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National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [ACPA & NASPA], 2010); therefore, faculty in HESA graduate programs have a unique responsibility to model effective practices when it comes to racial equity in classrooms.

The purpose of this article is to recommend strategies for building inclusive learning environments in HESA graduate programs. Specifically, in this article we illuminate the racialized experiences of students of color in HESA graduate programs, highlighting their relationships with faculty, experiences in classrooms, and recommendations for inclusive pedagogical practices.

We broadly refer to race as the social construction of categories often used for classification purposes; ethnicity as the particular identity within a racial category with which a person identifies; and culture as the set of values, rituals, and beliefs to which a person subscribes, often in relationship to their race or ethnicity. Additionally, throughout the collection of data, we encouraged student participants to define their own race, ethnicity, and culture and used the language they invoked whenever possible. After situating our work in the literature on racial microaggressions and in faculty's role in negotiating discussions about race in classrooms, we describe critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework and methodology for conducting this study. Next, we share findings of the study, and we conclude with implications and recommendations for inclusive pedagogical practice in HESA graduate programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature that explores racial microaggressions has grown exponentially over the past several years. Scholars in education and counseling psychology have combined racial microaggression frameworks and CRT to illustrate the breadth and depth of racism and racial microaggressions in faculty and students' lives (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nada, & Esquilin, 2007; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Microaggressions include the "everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages" (Sue, 2010, p. 3) and are often committed by well-intentioned peers, faculty, and administrators. Results of microaggressions include exhaustion and burnout (Wells, 2008) and negative emotional, mental, and physical health (Constantine & Sue, 2007).

Graduate students of color experience microaggressions perpetuated by peers and faculty at individual, institutional, and structural levels (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Nadal, Pituc, Johnston, & Esparrago, 2010). Racial microaggressions directed toward graduate students include assumptions of criminality; ascriptions of intelligence (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010); allegations of oversensitivity and white student denial of racism (Clark, Spanierman, Reed, Soble, & Cabana, 2011); isolation, marginalization, and tokenization (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010); questioning of credibility (Gomez, Khurshid, Freitag, & Lachuk, 2011); white faculty's fear of providing challenging feedback (Constantine & Sue, 2007); and expressions of paternalistic adoration (Clark, Spanierman, Reed, Soble, & Cabana, 2011).

White students' responses to discussions on race and racism further perpetuate racial microaggressions and set a tone for discussing race. Students of color note that white students typically avoid conversations related to race (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Harris, Linder, Hubain, & Allen, 2013; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009), expect to be praised for little effort related

to engaging in reflections on their race (Bondi, 2013), and deflect attention from their racialized behaviors by crying (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Each of these behaviors limit the effectiveness of classroom dialogues related to race, resulting in few opportunities for growth and development for white students and students of color.

Minimal research focusing on the racialized experiences of students in HESA graduate programs illuminate similar findings. Flowers and Howard-Hamilton (2002) conducted a focus group with seven students of color who experienced tokenism, inconsistencies between curriculum and behavior among faculty related to race issues, and discomfort from faculty members discussing diversity. More recently, Kelly and Gayles (2010) considered graduate students' experiences in diversity courses. Students of color described tokenization, expectations of serving as the "racial expert" (Kelly & Gayles, 2010, p. 81), and an inability and unwillingness of white students to engage in racial dialogue. When white students shifted the conversation away from race and exhibited "fear and lack of openness and honesty in racial dialogue" (Kelly & Gayles, 2010, p. 82), students of color could not engage at a level needed to further develop their skills and knowledge related to race.

Consistent with the literature on organizational diversity resistance, students of color identify overt and subtle forms of resistance, stemming from both individuals and organizations in their courses and overall graduate experiences (Thomas & Plaut, 2008). Perpetuated by both peers and faculty, resistance to diversity takes the form of silence related to issues of equity, mixed messages related to diversity in an organization, and minimization of the experiences of people who are outside the norm of an organization (Thomas & Plaut, 2008). Resistance to diversity in higher education is in itself a subtle form of racism, a microaggression. Rooted in fear of the unknown or concerns about lessening access to power (Thomas & Plaut, 2008), students and faculty, alike, hold responsibility for challenging microaggressions in the form of resistance to diversity in graduate education.

An emerging body of literature highlights the need for faculty to develop skills in facilitating dialogues about race and racism in undergraduate and graduate classrooms (Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, & Carlson, 2013; Quaye, 2012). Research indicates white students and students of color desire faculty to intervene in racially hostile situations, yet many fail to do so (Boysen, 2012). The failure to intervene is often rooted in a lack of training, experience, or willingness to engage in "difficult dialogue" (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009, p. 183). Additionally, some faculty do not intervene because they are the perpetrators of microaggressions (Boysen, 2012) or they do not recognize microaggressions are happening (Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, & Carlson, 2013). Faculty also avoid addressing racism because they do not want to make white students feel bad or because they fear that addressing race will take away from the content of the course (Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, & Carlson, 2013; Quaye, 2012). Further, a lack of skill related to handling emotions in the classroom and a lack of understanding of the significance of racism in students' lives contribute to faculty's failure to respond to racism in classrooms (Boysen, 2012).

When faculty do choose to intervene, they engage various strategies including turning the situation into a teachable moment (Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, & Carlson, 2013), normalizing emotions from both white students and students of color (Quaye, 2012; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nada, & Esquilin, 2007), and legitimizing discussions on race (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nada, & Esquilin, 2007). Students of color have indicated several strategies have been effective in addressing race and racism in the classroom. In addition to validating and legitimizing discussions about race, students note faculty's comfort addressing

race and racism, ability to engage a direct approach to facilitate discussions, and "willingness to accept a different racial reality from students of color" (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nada, & Esquilin, 2007, p. 188) all contribute to effective facilitation of racial dialogue.

While prior research distinguishes between white faculty and faculty of color (Quaye 2012), the majority of the extant literature indicates faculty of all races fail to intervene and lack skills for managing emotions in classrooms (Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, & Carlson, 2013). However, the rationale for choosing not to engage race and the consequences of addressing race in classrooms are different for white faculty and faculty of color. Faculty of color are often penalized in their teaching evaluations for focusing too much on race and told by their faculty colleagues they are being too sensitive about race (Patton & Catching, 2009). White faculty's failure to intervene often stems from not recognizing racism or not knowing how to address it (Boysen, 2012). Although reasons for failing to intervene are different for various faculty, the consequences are significant for students of color.

The current study builds on the literature regarding the experiences of graduate students of color and provides additional evidence of and implications for racial microaggressions perpetuated in HESA graduate programs. While racial microaggressions perpetuated in any graduate program are problematic, they are especially troublesome in a field that prides itself on diversity and inclusion. Further, this study contributes to the emerging body of literature, providing specific strategies for faculty to build inclusive learning environments.

METHODS

We employed a critical race theory (CRT) framework (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), supported by literature on racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010) to design the study. While CRT largely grew from critical legal studies, scholars have adapted CRT for use in education (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Central tenets of CRT highlight racism as endemic and permanent, appearing both "normal and natural" to people in US culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 113). CRT also highlights the concept of interest convergence, the notion that advancements for people of color only occur when it benefits white society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Acknowledging the social construction of race, CRT recognizes that dominant society racializes, or shapes the meaning of race, to benefit their own economic needs and desires. Finally, a more recent development in CRT scholarship notes the importance of intersectionality and anti-essentialism, emphasizing the reality that no person is solely defined by racial identity—every person has additional identities that influence his or her experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

To approach this research, we used critical race methodology (CRM) which "foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). CRM utilizes storytelling to center race, racism, and racialized experiences in research. Scholars engaging in CRM seek to expose white supremacy by illuminating the experiences of students of color through counter-stories. Because research often highlights the experiences of students of color through a deficit perspective, the purpose of CRM is to interrupt the master narrative of white supremacy and race deficit to "turn the margins into places of transformative resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37).

Participants and Data Collection

Twenty-nine students in their second year or later in HESA master's degree programs in the US participated in interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes. The participants of this study included 21 women and 8 men; no participants identified themselves as transgender. Ten students identified as African American or black, 10 as Latin@ or Hispanic, six as Asian American, and three as multiracial. Of the 29 participants, 24 identified as heterosexual while five identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. Three of the 29 participants were part-time students with full-time jobs in higher education; 26 were full-time students with graduate assistantships. The students represented 21 of the approximately 130 graduate preparation programs in student affairs (Graduate Program Directory, n.d.). The institutions in our sample included five private institutions (three of which were religiously affiliated) and 16 public institutions (one identified themselves as a public liberal arts; the other 15 as research, flagship, or comprehensive universities). Six of the institutions are located in the Northeastern region of the US, two in the Southeast, one in the Southwest, four in the Midwest, and eight in the West.

Consistent with CRM, interview questions provided an opportunity for participants to share their stories in depth to provide a counter-story to the master, deficit-based narratives about students of color in graduate school (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). We often started questions with the phrase, "Tell me about . . ." to facilitate students sharing their stories. Some specific questions included:

- Tell me about your experience in your graduate program. What have you really appreciated about the program and what do you think could improve your experience in the program?
- Tell me about your experiences in the classroom. How have your faculty influenced your experience in the classroom? What about your peers?
- How do you experience your racial identity in your graduate program? What kinds of things do you notice related to your race?
- How does race intersect with some of your additional social identities (gender, sexual orientation, etc.) in your experiences in your graduate program?

In addition to individual interviews, 11 participants participated in a two-hour focus group, exploring the preliminary findings of the study and further describing their experiences. The researcher provided an overview of the themes generated from the individual interviews and asked participants to respond to those themes.

Seven researchers (two white and five of color) interviewed the participants via Skype or phone. The primary investigator (a white woman faculty member) facilitated the focus group. The original research team consisted of seven researchers; four of those researchers continued their involvement beyond the interview process. The current research team consists of one white woman tenure-track faculty member and three doctoral students of color, two women and one man. The racial and gender identities of the research team are relevant to provide context for the study. Each person approaches her or his work through a critical lens, and the research team regularly engaged in reflection about the ways their own identities interacted with the research process.

Data Analysis and Rigor

Each interview and the focus group were transcribed, and members of the research team engaged in a three-cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2009). Each transcript was reviewed by the primary investigator and one additional member of the research team. Consistent with CRM, we coded with attention to "foregrounding race and racism" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24) in the students' experiences. The first cycle of coding resulted in 91 codes, which the research team then grouped into larger themes related to the research questions. To ensure rigor in the research process, we employed Lincoln's (2001) trustworthiness criteria: confirmability, dependability, and transferability. By engaging the participants in the process of member-checking and review, we met the criteria of credibility. Additionally, we have presented these data at several conferences, both regionally and nationally, where we have gained insight from conference participants serving as peer reviewers, serving the peer review process of the confirmability criteria. Further, by providing researcher perspectives and writing the findings using the participants' words and language, we provide the reader enough information to determine the transferability of the data to their unique situations. In this article, we share findings related to students' racialized experiences with faculty and in classrooms and highlight students' recommended strategies for building racially inclusive learning environments.

FINDINGS

Findings shed light on the racialized experiences of students of Color in HESA graduate programs. Specifically, we highlight students' relationships and interactions with faculty, students' experiences in classrooms with peers and faculty, and students' recommendations for racially-conscious learning spaces. Findings indicate that students experience racial microaggressions in their classes and desire relationships with faculty in their graduate programs. Additionally, students noted the importance of authenticity and validation in racially inclusive learning environments.

Relationships and Interactions with Faculty

Most students in this study intentionally chose their graduate programs based on the reputation of the program and their feelings of being connected to the other students and faculty in the program during recruitment events. However, upon arriving on campus, they expressed disappointment about the lack of interaction with faculty. Although a few students shared experiences of receiving support from faculty of color in their programs, most expressed that both faculty of color and white faculty were inaccessible or "too busy" to interact with students, further contributing to feelings of isolation in their graduate programs:

> While I've been here, a lot of our professors have gone on sabbatical . . . [so there] is not as much as faculty interaction as I would have liked. I'll have a class with them and then they will kind of disappear to go do their research . . . I've really appreciated the level that our faculty are at and the work that they do, but also kind of want more interaction with them.

A few students noted specific racial differences in the ways they were treated by particular faculty. One student shared his experience of feeling dismissed by a faculty member who had strong relationships with other, presumably white, students in the program:

> And it just kind of felt so pushed aside and . . . I often feel very dismissed by her . . . seeing how she treats other students and talking to them about whatever they're doing, and I never have those conversations with her . . . I feel short-changed.

Another student shared similar feelings of tokenization and dismissal by a faculty member in his department:

> There are times that, whether or not I'm going to the chair of my program or someone else, they'll refer me back to talk to my adviser, "Oh by the way, you should be talking about this with [your adviser] . . . you don't need to talk to me about this." . . . [I] kind of feel . . . little bit dismissed, or kind of a little shoved aside . . . [My adviser] is an African American man, and I think that the chair of our program is strategic in terms of putting certain students with certain faculty for advisement. So, me being a black male, I think she thinks I would benefit from a black male.

This student's experience alludes to the fact that issues affecting students of color become additional responsibilities for faculty of color, alleviating white faculty of their responsibility to engage with all students and to become multiculturally competent or to effectively engage with students from a variety of social backgrounds, including race and ethnicity (Young & Brooks, 2008). Not only is this marginalizing to students of color, it also contributes to a negative racial environment for faculty of color. By expecting faculty of color to take on the sole responsibility for supporting students of color, they are required to engage in extra service with no formal reward for doing so.

Similarly, students gave specific examples of times they felt invalidated by faculty in their programs, often connecting it specifically to their racial identities. One student described an interaction with a faculty member who did not understand the ways in which her racial identity influenced her experience in a counseling class:

> I remember having a panic attack with [this faculty member] . . . she kept on saying, "You have to go deeper, you have to go deeper". . . I was like, "That's really awkward for me. I'm Asian American, we don't talk in these ways" . . . We were just both at a standstill and I think my anxiety went "poof!" and then I passed out. Then it was like, "Okay, yes, I think you need to drop this class." I was like, "Great, now I feel even more crazy."

This student experienced a lack of cultural competence on the part of her faculty member. Faculty training often does not include a focus on multicultural competence, so many faculty do not understand (or ignore) their roles in addressing racism, resulting in the continued marginalization of students of color in graduate education (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nada, & Esquilin, 2007). Students' distant, non-existent, or negative interactions with faculty significantly influenced their experience in their graduate programs and their experiences in classrooms. Tokenization, hypervisibility, invisibility, and marginalization are all examples of racial microaggressions (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009) and illustrate the pervasiveness of racism in educational institutions (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Classroom Experiences

Contrary to the explicitly stated focus on diversity and social justice, many students expressed disappointment in the ways faculty and students in their programs enacted this commitment, specifically as it related to faculty practices in classrooms and the engagement of their white peers. Consistent with previous research about faculty engaging in difficult conversations in classrooms, students noted faculty discomfort and ineffectiveness when discussing race and racism in classrooms (Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, & Carlson, 2013; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nada, & Esquilin, 2007). Students described their requisite diversity courses as some of the most racially-hostile classes in the programs.

Faculty failures to discuss race and racism and to address racial microaggressions in classrooms were prevalent themes in individual interviews and the focus group. Minimizing or ignoring racism is an example of resistance to diversity (Thomas & Plaut, 2008). One student's experience illuminates the problem expressed by many students in the study:

> This faculty was not able to jump into dialogue. There were statements that were being said that were flat out racist, and she wouldn't say anything. Even in the beginning she said, ". . . this is the kind of class, where we can respect each other, you know, blah, blah, blah". . . I was personally disappointed at that because I was really looking forward to this [class] . . . I didn't feel safe in the classroom.

Another student provided a very specific example of her disappointment when her faculty member did not intervene when one of her classmates referred to her as "one of them over there."

> [One of my classmates] was like, "I wanted to move back to something that. . ." and she looked at me and looked at my classmate, the other Latina female, and said, "that one of them over there," and kind of waved her hand in our direction. For me, I was like, "Whoa, she just referred to us as 'one of them,"' she waved her hand . . . it felt disrespectful to me. And I felt like that was the perfect opportunity for the professor to say, "I think it was Michelle who made that comment," or "Are you referring to Michelle or are you referring to Veronica?" And give us an identity as an individuals as opposed to letting her purposely refer to "one of them over there." [The professor] didn't say anything and I could tell that the professor noticed and was somewhat flustered that that happened and didn't know how to react.

When faculty fail to intervene in situations like this, students of color may feel that they have a responsibility to serve as the racial expert, teaching their peers and faculty about issues of race and racism. Additionally, when faculty do not speak up or intervene in racially hostile situations (Thomas & Plaut, 2008), they miss an opportunity to educate a large number of students about racism and communicate that racist behavior is acceptable.

Students described a lack of depth in their courses, especially as it related to race and racism. A few students indicated they had a diversity day or one assigned diversity chapter in several courses, but most students described frustration because diversity topics were only covered in one course or not at all. Further, when race and racism were discussed, the conversation lacked depth or was "left hanging," as described here:

> It felt like some conversations were left hanging. And there were times when students in the cohort asked faculty to set up follow-up meetings to have dialogue because there was the potential for things to explode based on certain people that weren't quite getting the message . . . especially when it has to do with issues of race.

Failure to engage in depth around issues of racism contributes to students' lack of understanding and development regarding race for both white students and students of color. Students of color regularly reported feeling as though they did not have the same opportunities for growth as their white peers because discussions about race never moved beyond the surface level. One student described how he believed that students of color in his program "did not move further in our development," related to race, because they were waiting for white students to catch up to the conversation about race and racism. He further elaborated that the students of color were expected to "still share our experiences and no one else [e.g., white students] would."

Failing to challenge white students to deeply engage in race discussions centers the dominant group's learning needs at the expense of subordinated groups. When white students are not expected to explore race and racism in depth, students of color do not have the opportunity to continue their own racial understanding because class discussions remain surface-level, and students of color become the educators in these spaces. The failure to engage also contributes to white student affairs professionals' inability to contribute to the creation of racially inclusive campus climates, further perpetuating the notion that racially inclusive environments are the responsibility of professionals of color.

In addition to the failure to intervene and facilitate in-depth conversations about race, students also expressed disappointment in the facilitation of their diversity-related courses. Participants expected their multicultural courses to be the course in their program where they had the opportunity to explore race and racism in more depth and have their experiences as a person of color validated. Instead, many students experienced diversity-related courses as more racially hostile than other courses. Students' expectations were higher for these courses as described here:

> This semester we are taking a diversity class where we are learning about diversity on a college campus so that has been interesting . . . I definitely had high expectations for that class and I was excited for it and it's been disappointing because I don't think my [white] peers have engaged it as much because we talk about difficult things that not everybody likes to talk about.

In addition to students of color not having the same opportunities as their white peers for in-depth engagement on issues related to race and racism, students also experienced classrooms that should be racially sensitive as hostile and disappointing.

Faculty have a responsibility to engage in pedagogical practices that create inclusive, meaningful opportunities for all students. Next, we explore students' recommendations for strategies to build inclusive learning environments.

Experiences with Inclusive Learning Environments

We asked students to share their experiences with inclusive learning environments and their recommendations for faculty striving to create these spaces. Students' positive experiences in classrooms echoed a variety of strategies in the literature about inclusive classroom management, including recognizing the role of emotion in learning, naming, and discussing power dynamics in the learning space, applying course content to events that are relevant in students' lives, and engaging authentically with students (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; hooks, 1994).

One student described the importance of faculty facilitating "hard conversations" to alleviate some the pressure students of color feel to speak up to correct misinformation and misperceptions:

> I think it's sometimes important for professors to facilitate those hard conversations because I feel like sometimes . . . too much of the time it's been on the shoulders of the students in the class to start talking about those issues, especially when we're talking about race particularly . . . because there's only two of us.

Similarly, another student described the importance of inviting further exploration or clarification from students in classrooms, acknowledging the complexity of doing so:

> I think my faculty are really good, especially my faculty of color, are really good at not letting statements or comments . . . offend anybody and they do a really good job of combatting that and . . . kind of delving in and saying, "So what I hear you saying is this and really what do you mean by that?" really giving that person a chance to speak and clarify themselves but also almost coercing them in a certain way of how they need to be careful of what they are saying because of how it can be misconstrued . . . I always feel like they handled it in such a good way where I'm not walking out of the classroom pissed off or mad.

The faculty member's strategy for compassionately approaching diversity-related topics helped this student who felt marginalized in previous learning environments to feel at ease in this classroom. It appears the faculty member in this situation created a space in which he or she could seek clarification from students and challenge notions of privilege without isolating students of color or shutting down white students.

Students also discussed the importance of setting group norms or ground rules at the beginning of each class. A few students described this process in detail, highlighting the importance of exploring the meaning of the norms. This student describes her interpretation of the use of "respect" in the classroom and how power dynamics influence individual's perceptions of respect:

> I feel like [respect is translated to] . . . "Oh, I don't want to hurt your feelings," but I think we all have different ideas of what respect is, and I feel like . . . a lot of times, when you say respect, there's a completely different connotation of what it might mean because of a power dynamic in the classroom. So what [some people] might see as respect is turning your head away from a controversial topic or discussion because you're respecting that there shouldn't be feelings in the classroom . . . and that there shouldn't be debate in the classroom. I would challenge [faculty] to either stop doing that or just to unpack, decompress that, and really get folks to define [respect] in different ways.

Learning to effectively facilitate conversations about race and racism requires time, practice, and a willingness to continue to learn long after beginning to teach in a graduate program. As indicated here, emotions run high when discussing diversity and race-related issues, making it even more important for faculty to engage authentically with students, allowing students the opportunity to get to know faculty, resulting in a higher likelihood of students sharing their negative experiences and concerns so that faculty know how to address them in classrooms.

Authenticity

Students described authenticity as an important component of inclusive learning environments. They felt more comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives when faculty shared their own perspectives and personal struggles related to issues of inclusion. One student described the significance of faculty vulnerability:

> One of the classes taught last semester was taught by a lesbian woman . . . she talked us through her coming-out experience and some of the discrimination she's faced in her lifetime and her experience about her partner and some of the daily things that they go through. And so she's established her vulnerability with the class and that made me feel safe and has allowed me . . . to feel comfortable in asking questions.

Another student described the importance of building relationships with faculty as a way to feel comfortable participating in class:

> Prior to going to college, I never met a faculty member in my life. So for me, it was really important to have that, to see that they were real people. They're not just people that come into the classroom, teach a class, and leave. It was interesting to build those relationships because that positively affected my participation in the classroom.

Additionally, students described engaging in opportunities to get to know their classmates and faculty as essential parts of a positive classroom experience. This students' experience indicated the importance of including racial and additional social identities as a significant part of community building:

> Initially, in the program we had a retreat. There we talked about our ethnic background and how that affected our lives, and our racial background and how that affected our lives, and we talked about how all our other identities and what that meant for us as new incoming grad students of color, [and that] we're going to change. And it also bonded us all together, including faculty. So that made it a little easier to be in the classroom . . . feeling like I know [them] a little bit better, making it a little more comfortable talking to this person.

Even though a foundational principle of the field of HESA includes the development of the whole person, faculty in graduate programs often overlook this important aspect of community building or assume it happens organically among students in social settings. Although this may occur, rebuilding community each semester and in each course remains vitally important. Students are likely to feel more comfortable engaging authentically when they know it is an expectation for all students to engage authentically and that the faculty member will intervene when necessary.

Students also described the importance of faculty modeling behavior and engaging in the community as strategies for building inclusive learning environments. One student described how she observed her faculty member interacting with students and the influence that had on her thought process:

> seeing how they interact with different groups of students and so it's like, ok, this is kind of the model that we should follow and this is how we should be with our students and how we should be with each other.

Similarly, the act of showing up goes a long way in supporting students of color in graduate programs. Attending events that graduate students have organized and encouraging students to get involved with things that are relevant to their interests indicates to students that faculty value their work. Similarly, students described the importance of faculty addressing current issues in class discussions, "If there is something going on in the news or something's going on on campus, we can bring it to the classroom and talk about what it is so that it might be something that is affecting other people."

When faculty demonstrate an understanding of students' interests and experiences, students feel more connected to the faculty member and will likely speak up about instances where they have felt marginalized so the faculty member can take the time to address it. Scholars recommend authentically connecting with students as an effective strategy for building inclusive classrooms; the experiences of the students in this study further illuminate the importance of this strategy.

Engaging authentically and vulnerably, especially for faculty of color and faculty with additional marginalized identities, is complex. Authenticity and vulnerability invite some students to take faculty less seriously because they have been socialized to see faculty as distant and impersonal, and when this does not happen, they assume the faculty lack credibility (Tuitt, 2003). Additionally, when some faculty engage authentically with students while others in the same program do not, they may bear additional service and mentoring responsibilities (Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2013). The responsibility for engaging with students of color in an authentic way cannot be solely the responsibility of faculty of color in graduate programs.

Validation

Consistent with Rendón's (1994) theory of validation, students in this study described experiences with faculty members, who validated their experiences and recognized them as competent learners, as significant in their growth experiences. Several students described one-on-one experiences where faculty members supported and validated them. Most of these examples were from advising relationships and most also were relationships with faculty of color. One student described his experience with his adviser of color:

> I remember him saying to me, many months ago, "Eric, you know, I know you have so much passion and I want to see it, I know it's there and I can't wait for you to bring it out." And that kind of made me feel good, I was like, "You know what, you're right, I really have not been able to bring out that and I don't know why, maybe because I'm in this venue and you know, my [peers] may be intimidating me," but for him to say something that was inspiring was great and very uplifting.

Students also described the importance of faculty advisers supporting their decisions to address race and racism in various ways, rather than expecting them to address it in a particular way:

> Accept the experiences that the students are having, so don't sit there and say, "That's really bad. You shouldn't be feeling that way." Accept it for what it is and work with that student to figure out what they want to do about it.

Students engage varying strategies for coping with microaggressions (Allen, Hubain, Linder, & Harris, 2013). Faculty in graduate programs have a unique opportunity to support students managing their experiences without placing value or pushing students to respond in a particular way. One strategy students use to manage racial microaggressions is building community with other students of color (Allen et al., 2013). This student describes the role of faculty in supporting the development of such networks:

> [It is important to acknowledge] that there can be different experiences for people who hold different identities. So, we've had . . . student of color gatherings, last time it was in the office of multicultural affairs, but I would just say just acknowledging that. I don't know in what form it would take, maybe something that's also faculty initiated, just acknowledging there are different identities that may cause

> people to experience graduate education differently and I think it's important and helpful for students to hear that or for people to be on the same page . . . I think just a place for those voices to come out and people feel like they can relate to others and that their experience isn't isolated.

In addition to faculty's role of acknowledging the complexities of social identities in graduate education, students also recommended that faculty explicitly discuss race in relationship to their course topics. As described earlier, many students' negative experiences in their programs resulted from a lack of attention to race and racism in their coursework, so it is not surprising that several students mentioned the importance of both having a multicultural competence-related course and incorporating discussions of race and racism in their classes as important strategies. Students also described incorporating texts and activities related to race and diversity in coursework as an effective strategy for building inclusive classrooms.

Students' experiences with positive learning environments demonstrate the importance of taking the time to engage in conversations related to race and racism in graduate classrooms. Students need their experiences acknowledged as legitimate and recognized as part of the curriculum of the program. This acknowledgement does not require any new coursework or additional time in classrooms; acknowledgement requires faculty to incorporate a variety of materials in their courses and to recognize the variations in students' experiences. While this may require work on the part of the faculty member outside the class, the change serves to positively influence everyone in the class, resulting in more well-educated student affairs professionals.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Consistent with CRT, our findings indicate that racism is, in fact, pervasive in graduate education (Ladson-Billings, 2009). By understanding the ways in which students of color experience racism in their HESA graduate programs, faculty may better develop strategies for addressing these issues, leading to improvements in recruitment, retention, and engagement of students of color in HESA graduate programs. Additionally, because inclusion and equity are stated values of HESA as a field, faculty in HESA have an additional responsibility to teach students to effectively facilitate dialogue about race and racism. By engaging students in racially inclusive classroom and program experiences, faculty model effective practice for students in HESA programs to carry with them in the roles as student affairs professionals. CRT scholars challenge researchers and educators to move beyond interpersonal relationships to address systemic racism in institutions of higher education (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002); faculty have the opportunity to significantly influence the larger campus climate by modeling inclusive behaviors in graduate programs and by supporting graduate students as they develop their own strategies for building and maintaining equitable campus climates.

Developing an inclusive pedagogy is an ongoing process; even seasoned faculty may need to adjust their classroom practices (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; hooks, 1994). Consistent with previous studies, participants in this study described ineffective practices of faculty when engaging in conversations related to race and racism (Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, & Carlson, 2013; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nada, & Esquilin, 2007). Specifically, students highlighted concerns related to their white peers' cultural competence and their faculty members' failure to intervene, resulting in students of color feeling responsibility to become the "educator"

in teachable moments with their white peers. This distracts from the learning process of students of color and creates contentious dynamics among students in graduate programs. Although some may argue students of color must learn to engage in conversations with white colleagues about race and racism as a part of their ongoing career, it is important to recognize the ways in which this distracts from students' learning experiences. Additionally, this perpetuates the notion that faculty and staff of color are primarily responsible for supporting students of color and addressing racism in campus environments. Further, students of color have plenty of practice addressing and managing racism in learning environments, as most have been doing it their entire educational careers; they do not need additional "practice" in graduate programs.

The finding that students of color experience significant racism in classrooms dedicated to diversity and multicultural issues warrants increased attention. Some activities used in diversity-related courses are designed to educate students in dominant groups at the expense of students in subordinated groups. While this happens across social identities, including gender, sexual orientation, and disability, in this study students described ways they felt marginalized in diversity classrooms through ineffective facilitation of discussion related to race and activities that focus on "taking on" the identity of people from marginalized groups. Current pedagogical literature highlights the importance of self-awareness and reflection as important components of multicultural competence (Tuitt, 2003). Gone are the days when it is appropriate to provide students with a checklist of things to consider when working with particular populations of students; more effective strategies include helping students become aware of the ways in which their identities have influenced their experiences, helping to make the subconscious conscious. For example, by facilitating activities in which students reflect on their own racial identity development processes, white students may gain an increased awareness of their racial socialization and privilege at the same time students of color may have new insights related to their own racialized experiences, resulting in improved learning for all students. Additionally, by facilitating an environment in which students can openly share their insights, these reflections may help students better understand their own experiences by hearing how they are similar or different from other students' experiences.

An additional implication from this series of findings is the importance of including pedagogical courses in doctoral graduate programs in HESA. When faculty fail to engage with issues of race and racism in classrooms, they indicate that they are unwilling or lack the skills to do so, or both (Thomas & Plaut, 2008). This may be directly related to the training they receive in doctoral graduate programs. Because faculty are primarily rewarded for strong scholarship, doctoral graduate programs often focus their curriculum on teaching doctoral students how to conduct research (Austin & McDaniels, 2006). Additionally, the same faculty teaching master's students are also teaching doctoral students, so it is safe to surmise that doctoral students experience similar racial microaggressions in their graduate education (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011). This raises the question of who can and should teach doctoral students effective strategies for building racially inclusive learning environments. If faculty of color primarily shoulder the responsibility of supporting students of color and addressing problems related to racism in higher education, the expectation of training culturally competent doctoral students adds an additional responsibility to the plates of already over-taxed faculty of color. White faculty must take some responsibility for developing themselves as culturally competent educators to contribute to the socialization of culturally competent doctoral students.

White students' inability or unwillingness to engage in conversations related to race and racism provides an opportunity for continued exploration of the pervasiveness of whiteness in HESA graduate programs (Ladson-Billings, 2009). White students regularly seek approval from their peers of color related to their engagement in race-related work and expect validation for engaging in minimal reflection and action (Bondi, 2013). This contrasts deeply with the findings of this study, that is, students of color indicating their white peers are not engaging in race-related discussions, and warrants increased attention by future scholars.

CONCLUSION

Despite an increased focus on social justice and diversity in HESA graduate programs, students of color indicate that they experience significant racial microaggressions in their graduate programs. Ranging from invalidation to tokenization to serving as the "cultural expert," students described examples of microaggressions perpetuated by well-meaning peers and faculty. Moreover, students of color highlight the importance of authenticity and validation in the creating of racially-conscious and racially-just educational spaces. We implore higher education scholars to reconsider their responsibility to engage culturally responsive pedagogy and consider their roles in addressing racial microaggressions in classrooms and the larger campus climate. Consistent with a CRT framework, racism is pervasive and permanent in institutions of higher education and faculty must do their part to address racism from an institutional, not just interpersonal, perspective (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

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