"It's Just a Reflection of America": Experiences of Black Collegians With Racism in the Residence Halls at a Historically White Institution

Tonisha B. Lane
Virginia Tech

Kali Morgan
Georgia Institute of Technology

LaFrance Clarke
Jimmy Hutchful
University of South Florida

Venice Adams
Virginia Tech

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the role of campus housing in being spaces of injustice for Black students at one Floridian, urban, research university. Using critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework, we analyzed focus group interview data of 28 self-identified Black collegians. From this analysis, three themes emerged: (a) navigating everyday racism with White roommates, (b) counterstories of Black resident advisors (RA), and (c) living-learning communities as microsystems of racial oppression. Based on these findings, we argue that if institutions are to become the beacon for diversity, equity, and inclusion that they purport to be, they need to be more intentional about how they add(red)ress racism in campus spaces. This vision is particularly critical for residence halls, which should be a place of respite for students.

Keywords: Black students, higher education, residence halls, racism

Introduction

At the time we were writing this paper, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd were killed at the hands of White police officers. Ahmaud Arbery, while jogging, was targeted and killed by White citizens. These deaths represent a recent stream of the mounting number of senseless killings experienced by Black men, women, and trans* individuals in the United States over the last 10 years. One may ask what the killing of Black bodies has to do with racism in the residence halls. We argue that the ways Black students experience interracial relations in the residence halls within a Floridian university act as a microcosm of the greater society. As one of our participants put it "It's just a reflection of

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America." To that end, until society sees and values the humanity of Black individuals in all places, as another of our participants asserted, the current state of affairs will continue to be "a reflection of America."

Residence halls are often one of the initial places college students encounter and make meaning of differences (Strange & Banning, 2015), and have the potential to enhance socially just dispositions among residents (Claros et al., 2017). In fact, students spend 70% of their time in residence halls (Johnson, 2003). As such, they are designed to be spaces where students can find solace and respite from the rigors of studying (Haynes, 2019). However, for Black students, residence halls at historically White institutions (HWIs) have become a proverbial war zone, where they anticipate and prepare for racial microaggressions (Haynes, 2019). For example, based on a social media post, the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2017) reported that a White student spat in her Black roommate's hair oil, placed molded food in lotion, and used her roommate's toothbrush on her body parts among other atrocious behaviors. These are the incidents that often go unreported. Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of campus housing as spaces of injustice for Black students at one Floridian institution. This paper builds upon previous research showing the nuances of racial discrimination in residence halls. Specifically, we highlight the insidious nature of racism and how it operates on multiple levels, affecting student residents, resident advisors (RAs), and living-learning communities (LLCs).

Literature Review

Black Students' Racialized Experiences in Campus Housing

Black students are more likely to perceive the climate in residence halls at HWIs as unjust and unwelcoming than their majority peers (Harwood et al., 2018; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017). Residence halls are treated as colonized spaces wherein Black collegians are perceived as a threat to the ecosystem and the overall well-being of the territory (Harwood et al., 2018; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017). To this end, Blacks are seen as outsiders to be excluded from common courtesies and norms that are generally conferred on White residents (Haynes, 2019). Whiteness may also function as a structuring property in the residence halls (Harris, 2019). This property situates White individuals in places of supremacy, while positioning Blacks in stations of inferiority. It is primarily used to dominate, control, and subjugate people of color. The right to exclude is also a property of this power to subjugate and dominate (Harris, 2019).

Research also shows Black students who share on-campus housing with White students endure cumulative microaggressions (Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2018). These subtle, but intentional slights are often enacted with pin-pricking precision and accuracy (Haynes, 2019). Microaggressions may take the form of surveillance where a Black student is given unjust oversight by those in authority or those who believe that their Whiteness has conferred authority on them (Iverson & Jaggers, 2015).

Black students experience more microaggressions when they have roommates from another race (Fosnacht et al., 2020). Non-Black roommates tend to lash out at Black roommates because of their lack of cultural familiarity with their Black roommates. Having cultural familiarity also contributes to a more cohesive sense of belonging for students of color (Erb et al., 2014; Fosnacht et al., 2020). While same race roommates may have a shared understanding of cultural knowledge, this may not be present with a roommate from a different race (Erb et al., 2014; Fosnacht et al., 2020). As such, participants in Hotchkins and Dancy's study (2017) noted that they did not spend much time in the residence halls because they did not want to be confronted with the racial microaggressions within those environments.

Experiences of Black Resident Advisors (RA) in the Residence Halls

RAs sit at the intersection of students and employees. While the RA position can be difficult for any student leader, it is especially challenging for Black students because of the pervasive discrimination they face (Linley, 2018). There are few studies that center the experiences of Black RAs. Among these studies, two of them highlight the disparate and racialized experiences of Black RAs. In a phenomenological study, Harper et al. (2011) found that Black men RAs are sometimes positioned to play out tropes of "angry Black men" when conflict arises with supervisors. Because other peer RAs do not want to appear confrontational, they allow the Black men on staff to raise shared concerns. Additionally, Black RA men encountered residents that seemed surprised to discover they had a Black RA, and they noted feeling the need to prove their competence to White supervisors and peers (Harper et al., 2011). Likewise, in a study that applied phenomenography, Black women RAs underscored how frequently they experienced racial microaggressions as RA staff (Roland & Agosto, 2017). They also revealed being provided little to no training regarding how to resist these attacks. Consequently, they felt uncomfortable having conversations about race and racism with White residents even amid the numerous national and campus-related incidents contributing to activism within and outside of the university (Roland & Agosto, 2017).

While many residence life departments espouse to be interested in diversifying RA staff, Healea and Hale (2016) concluded that pursuing structural diversity is not enough to ensure that staff of color are intentionally included in decision-making and improving departmental climate. They took a case study approach to uncover RA staff recruitment gaps at a large, private, research university as well as barriers and facilitators for recruiting a more diverse RA staff. Like Roland and Agosto (2017), Healea and Hale (2016) found that conversations concerning diversity fell short because staff is unprepared to engage in such topics. The authors also reported an apparent reluctance to return to training about diversity later in the academic year after initial training had occurred.

Living-Learning Communities

Learning communities feature two or more classes that a group of students take together around an academic theme, thereby facilitating deep interaction among the faculty and students. The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) has designated learning communities as a high impact practice (HIP), which it defines as an educational practice that may improve engagement and retention (Kuh, 2008). Living-learning communities (LLCs) are a specific type of learning community that furthers engagement through the inclusion of a residential requirement, where students in clustered classes or pursuing a co-curricular theme, live on the same floor(s) (Inkelas et al., 2006). The intent of LLCs is to promote academic and social integration by synthesizing students' residential experiences with those from their extra-, co-, and curriculum (Inkelas et al., 2008; Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Everything students need is thus embedded in the LLC structure: "faculty and staff mentors, peers with similar interests, and an automatic community; the student is immediately a member of both on the residential floor and in the classroom" (Price-Williams et al., 2019, p. 233). As a result, compared with students in traditional residence halls, students who participate in LLCs report greater ease in building community with their floormates, higher grade point averages, increased use of hall resources, more and deeper interactions with faculty, and greater involvement on campus (Price-Williams et al., 2019; Sriram & Diaz, 2016).

Yet, further research is needed to understand Black and other racially minoritized students' experiences in LLCs. For example, McCormick et al. (2017) found that Black students' overall satisfaction rate tends to be much lower than students with other racial identities. In another study of students of color participating in a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) LLC, findings revealed many benefits of LLC participation including academic and social integration (Sriram & Diaz, 2016). However, they also found that living in the LLC supported and

simultaneously minimalized students' minoritized racial identities. Students reported that they did not feel their racial identity significantly influenced the way the LLC impacted them (Sriram & Diaz, 2016). In contrast, Johnson's (2012) study on Black women's experience in STEM LLCs uncovered that women felt less of a sense of belonging than their White peers. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of campus housing, including LLCs, in being spaces of injustice for Black students at one Floridian institution.

Theoretical Framework

We utilized critical race theory (CRT) as a framework to understand the Black student experience at Metropolitan State University (MSU, pseudonym) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Drawing upon the tenets of critical race theory (i.e., counter-storytelling, permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and critique of liberalism) enabled us to examine the systematic power differences in the residence halls created by race. The tenets are discussed below.

Counter-storytelling is a method that "legitimizes the racial and subordinate experiences of marginalized groups through their lived experiences and thoughts" (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54). The permanence of racism demonstrates the power racism holds within the political, social, and economic environments in the U.S. Whiteness as property connects the privilege of being White to the systematic control and rights to "enjoyment, disposition and exclusion" (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 55). Interest convergence asserts that systems purported to create opportunities for people of color often further the advancement of White individuals at a disproportionate level (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The critique of liberalism challenges notions of neutrality, equal opportunity, and colorblindness that ignore racial and social inequalities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In the current study, we used CRT to critically analyze our data and unearth racism advanced through interpersonal and organizational features in the residence halls.

Methods

We applied a phenomenological approach to this study because of its emphasis on an in-depth examination of the lived experiences traversing a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon central to this study is the racialized experiences of Black students living in residence halls at a HWI in Florida. The research questions that guided this study were: (1) What are the racial realities of Black students in the residence halls at an urban, public, historically White, research university in Florida? and (2) In what ways do interpersonal (i.e., roommates) and organizational (i.e., being an RA, LLCs) elements of living in the residence halls complicate Black students' experiences and well-being?

Context

The study took place at MSU during the 2018–2019 academic year. The university has more than 30,000 undergraduate students. The racial/ethnic makeup of the institution included 7% Asian, 10% Black/African American, 21% Latinx, 47% White, and 4% identified as two or more races. More than 50% of the student population identified as women. Approximately 20% of the students live in the residence halls.

Participants

Twenty-eight self-identified Black students participated in one of seven focus groups. There were two first-year students, three sophomores, seven juniors, 14 seniors, and one second-degree student. Twenty students identified as first-generation college students. Twenty-two participants identified as women, two participants identified as men, and one participant identified as queer. The students were majoring in the following disciplines: business (4), communication (3), science, technology,

engineering, and mathematics (STEM; 9), humanities (2), medicine and health (6), and social sciences (7). We recruited participants through email listservs generated through multiple student affairs offices including the multicultural affairs office and residence life as well as Black-identified student organizations (e.g., Black Student Union). Criterion and snowball sampling were applied to identify participants who could provide information-rich data concerning the phenomenon under investigation (Glesne, 2016). Participants were provided with a $20 Amazon gift card for participating in the study.

Data Collection

Because we were interested in having participants discuss experiences at the university and provide "multiple perspectives in the process" (Glesne, 2016, p. 123), we selected focus groups as our data collection technique. Focus group sessions ranged from 60–90 minutes, and questions covered a variety of areas including where participants experienced a sense of belonging, enjoyable and unpleasant aspects of campus life, and elements that influenced student success. Because of the nature of semi-structured, focus group interviewing, participants are able to freely introduce topics related to the interviewer's questions (Glesne, 2016). To this end, as participants felt comfortable discussing their lived experiences, conversations about racialized experiences in the residence halls emerged. We recorded the focus group interviews and had them professionally transcribed verbatim prior to analysis.

Data Analysis

We began our data analysis by reading all of the transcripts to determine what emerged as significant to the participants' experiences in the residence halls. Moustakas (1994) refers to this stage as the epoche. From our reading of the transcripts, we discovered that episodes of microaggressions, and specifically anti-Black aggression, were central to the participants' experiences. We also uncovered narratives about serving in the role of an RA and residing in the living-learning communities (LLCs) as having racialized undertones. Our textural analysis of the data revealed distinct participant experiences, while the structural analysis unearthed commonalities across the data (Moustakas, 1994). This process allowed us to take segments of the data and reduce them into themes and sub-themes. In the final stage of our analysis, we applied imaginative variation by using CRT to interpret and identify revelatory content relative to the nature and degree to which the participants experienced racism in the residence halls (Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, tenets of CRT were used to define the students' experiences and nuance our explanation of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

We established credibility through maintaining an audit trail of thoughts and ideas during the data collection process and throughout the data analysis (Anfara et al., 2002). We also facilitated several debriefing sessions to compare our analysis and interpretation of the data. Our inter-rater reliability strategy entailed reaching consensus. If we did not agree on how an utterance within the data was interpreted, we engaged our theoretical framework and previous research to illuminate possible alternative interpretations. We also enlisted a peer debriefer who has experience with critical scholarship to review our emergent findings (Anfara et al., 2002).

Findings and Discussion

Three themes emerged from this study: (a) navigating everyday racism with White roommates, (b) counterstories of Black resident advisors' (RA), and (c) living-learning communities as microsystems of racial oppression. We report on how participants experienced overt racism and microaggressions in residential spaces. Then, we show how Black RAs contended with residents who challenged their

authority and created hostile environments for them. Lastly, we interrogate LLCs as isolating spaces due to the structural and interpersonal climate. These experiences complicated the well-being of the participants because ordinary events and interactions became contested spaces, wherein Black students had to negotiate their identities amid sites of domination and oppression.

Navigating Everyday Racism With White Roommates

Participants explained how navigating racist interactions with White roommates created a psychological battleground for them. Participants had to exert significant energy to resist and cope with the many prejudicial acts that emerged in the residence halls. These incidents also highlighted some of the ways Whiteness was deployed, used, and enjoyed. Even practices as mundane as hair care became contentious. For example, one participant shared:

> We have different hair types obviously, because we're [racially] different, and I always wash my hair twice a week. [My roommate] made a comment about that one time, but I just ignored her...I wash my hair, blow dry my hair, and straighten it, and she always had a problem with—my hair care routine. She would always ask can I go to the bathroom and do that, instead of doing it in our room. However, our bathrooms didn't have sockets to plug in electrical things into the walls. I had no choice but to do it in our room. It just felt very uncomfortable and upsetting 'cause I'm also paying the same price for the room that she is. I don't understand why I must leave the room.

As the participant declared, she had the authority to style her hair within the room because she was "paying the same price." However, for White individuals, the unearned privileges afforded to them by way of their Whiteness positions them to claim and exert authority over spaces that are contractually designed to be shared. This example is one of the subtle ways that Whiteness as property manifests in residence hall settings, wherein White roommates attempt to dictate how space will be utilized.

Similarly, another participant illustrated Black women's hair care as a contested space, for discussion and interrogation in the residence halls, when she stated:

> …my first year I was rooming in [residence hall]. It was six of us, and I was the only Black girl. It would get uncomfortable after a while because they would ask questions. I had braids one time, and I was taking them out, and they were like, "How did your hair get so short?"

The literature highlights how Black hair is intricately intertwined with Black women's identities and how they see themselves (Phillips, 2011). The constant surveillance and questioning of an intimate aspect of one's identity can be unnerving. As such, the participants pointed out feeling "uncomfortable" and "upset." The racial undertones of these incidents independent of one another may not be impactful, but the cumulative nature of these insults is problematic and triggering. Further, White women may be less apt to know much about Black women's identities due to the legacy of de jure and de facto segregation within the United States (see Rothstein, 2015). Johnson (2018) argued that while the oppressed is keenly aware of the oppressor, the dominant group knows little about marginalized groups. Though reality television and other forms of media have revealed more about the lives of Black women, these forms of media often rely on fictitious tropes and stereotypes (Patterson, 2015). They also (mis)represent Black women as a monolithic group.

Participants provided other examples of commonplace racism in the residence halls. Several discussed how they were forced to contend with racial slurs from White roommates. One participant explained:

> We stopped being friends because she sent me a snapchat. I think she meant to send it to one of her White [friends]. It said something like—Would you rather this or Black P-U-S-S-Y? I was like, "What does that mean?" She's like, "Oh, no. It wasn't racist, blah, blah, blah. That's not how I meant [it]. You just took it that way." I was like, "I'm not stupid."

This scenario is a depiction of anti-Black oppression. The White roommate viewed her Black roommate as invisible and attempted to dehumanize her with an offensive "Snapchat" allegedly sent by accident (Abrica et al., 2020). Her roommate demonstrated a cultural disregard for the Black female body. When the participant confronted her roommate about the post, instead of apologizing, she insulted her intelligence. She minimized the participant's perception of the post as racially offensive. Moreover, the roommate attempted to downplay the microaggression she deployed, and she invalidated her roommate's interpretation as overblown and unfounded.

Counterstories of Black Resident Advisors

Racial hostility in the residence halls not only impacted the residents themselves, but also the RAs. Within focus group sessions, RA participants shared that they were challenged by the racist beliefs and attitudes of residents and peer RAs. While supervisors attempted to institute training to mitigate these beliefs, one participant concluded that such training offered little in the way of transformation among staff who were entrenched in their racist ideologies. We discuss these complex and multidimensional racial realities further in the next sections.

Racialized Fears of Be(com)ing an RA. The prospect of experiencing racism while serving as an RA may present concerns for potential applicants, as discussed by our participants. One participant witnessed racial bias as a student living in the residence halls and hoped her experiences would be different once she became an RA. She explained:

> Honestly, I was worried about that when I became an RA because I was like, "What if one of my residents does that to me?" I'm still afraid of that. My first conversation that I had with my residents, I tried to sense out maybe who could potentially do that. Now, we have cameras and stuff, so I feel a little bit safer, but it's always in the back of my mind. What if I write them up for drinking and then the next day, they write something on my door?

This student's quote demonstrates the deleterious impact racism can have on one's college experience. Many studies purport the inherent benefits of being an RA (Benjamin & Davis, 2016). Instead of enjoying this opportunity to serve and support the residential community in the capacity of an RA, one of the first tasks the participant sought to complete was to identify potential perpetrators of racism. While the thought of having cameras made the participant feel "safer," she still expressed concerns about the prospect of some altercation as she performed her duties, one of which required her to document infractions in the residence halls. This example highlights how the permeance of racism disrupts the normalcy of engaging in ordinary practices without fear of repercussions due to one's racial identity.

Healea and Hale (2016) suggested administrators be cognizant of circumstances such as these that undermine efforts to recruit and retain Black students in RA positions. While few participants in the study held RA positions, most shared that they witnessed offenses against Black RAs. For example, one participant noted:

> …I have a friend [who] was a[n] RA, and she was a Black woman. She was saying how her students were racist and there was no support from higher up to how to help with her residents who are racist and make racial comments not only to her, but to other people on the floor.

These conditions create an unwelcoming environment for residents and prospective RAs, making it difficult to diversify a role that continues to experience recruitment gaps (Healea & Hale, 2016). If RAs are to feel empowered in these roles, they need the support of the department as well as appropriate training and development to navigate these circumstances.

Dealing with Racist Peer RAs and Inadequacies of Bias Training. According to participants, some RA peers contributed to the poor racial climate in the residence halls. Participants also perceived that

supervisors, despite their best efforts, were unable to mitigate the racist attitudes of these staff members. One participant explained:

> I think for me, last year, one of my coworkers that was also an RA, [he] made it very clear that [he was] racist like extremely, crystal clear. Everybody knew. My supervisor knew but then he got rehired this year, so I think what could've been done with him is fire him or just don't rehire him.

In this scenario, the participant questions a system that would allow racist individuals to be rehired even when they display signs of racialized contempt. In response to these behaviors, the supervisor enacted bias training, but the participant did not believe this approach was suitable to remedy the problem with the RA. The participant continued:

> My supervisor made us watch videos talking about privilege, empathy, racism, and stuff like that. She had us do a discussion post…she had good intentions but it doesn't really do anything because he's still gonna say, "Well, I recognize White privilege and stuff," in her face, but behind closed doors, he's still gonna be racist. I think just not rehiring people like that and forcing them to go through training to realize we're people too. We deserve rights too. Maybe saying, "Well, if you don't participate in this and show a difference in your attitude, then X, Y, and Z is gonna happen," like actual consequences and not saying, "Well, we can't do anything about his beliefs."

While this story is unique to this participant, it does highlight perceptions of participants across focus groups concerning *well-intended*, but poorly executed strategies and approaches to disrupting racism within the residence halls and the institution at-large. This situation also demonstrates how Whiteness can be leveraged as property and capital to be used and bartered as needed. Previous studies show that there is a double-standard when it comes to handling decisions to rehire RA staff. In the Harper et al. (2011) study, participants believed that White RAs were retained even when they did not fulfill obligations associated with position. In contrast, Black RAs could be easily relieved of their positions for lesser offenses. In the current study, attending bias training, whether RAs changed their beliefs or practices, seemed to be sufficient to warrant decisions to rehire staff.

RA Departure as a Response to Racism. Ultimately, some RAs who felt they were unable to dismantle systems of racial oppression in the residence halls decided to resign. In particular, during the time of this study, heightened episodes of race-related RA targeting and intimidation ensued. Because RA rooms are easily identifiable with labels that demarcate their role in the residence hall, it is very easy to distinguish these rooms among other residents, making them a target for racist behavior. Common among these incidents are writing racial epithets on dry erase boards. Most RAs have these boards so that residents or other constituents can leave a message. However, they have increasingly become a site for macro- and micro-aggressions (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017). The following incident provides an example of how these egregious behaviors may unfold in a residence hall setting.

During the evening of the 2016 election, participants reported an alleged "Trump supporter" wrote a racial epithet on the RA's board. One participant explained:

> Even with writing slurs on a whiteboard, that happened [in] my hall and it happened to an RA. One of her residents wrote the N-word on her door. We didn't have cameras in the residence halls at that [time] so there was nothing that could be done. They moved her to a different room…but they could've given her more support. Because of that, a lot of RAs quit. They didn't come back.

The participant, along with others in the focus group, pointed out "nothing could be done" because there were no cameras in the residence hall to identify the perpetrator. Additionally, because these notes are not permanent, these episodes are not treated as serious, punishable crimes. While RAs

report being impacted by these incidents, little, if anything, is ever done to the perpetrator. In the aforementioned scenario, the RA who was on the receiving end of this incident was later removed from the residence hall. Such administrative responses actually punish the RA instead of the perpetrator because the RA has to take out time to pack, relocate, and other procedures associated with moving. Needless to say, following that academic year, several RAs resigned from their roles.

Living-Learning Communities as Microsystems of Racial Oppression

Participants encountered structural racism in the LLCs. For example, a participant who created a professional fraternity for continued relationships noted that her friends in the Mascot Major Community (MMC) were mostly *not* Black. She stated that these community members made the participant comfortable, yet they still lacked a mutual understanding:

> They don't make me feel bad or anything. It's not like we're not connected, but there's times, there's moments where I'm like—I don't know. Maybe they don't understand. I don't know. …Yeah. It's not the best at all, but they still make me feel welcome. I don't feel like they're racist or anything at all, but it's just like, there are just small moments where I'm like, dang. Where I just think of, what if I had rushed a black sorority? Would I have more friends or people to talk to? 'Cause I really don't have a lot of Black friends at all on campus just 'cause most of my friends are in the MMC. I love them to death, but sometimes, I miss it. That's what I had in high school. I had a whole bunch of all Black girls. We just stuck together throughout all high school...

While the participant valued her relationships in the LLC, she did not realize how important it was to her to have cultural connectedness, such as she would find in a Black Greek-letter organization. This realization aligns with Johnson's (2012) finding that a healthy "broader campus racial climate" may compensate in some ways for the negative environments in STEM fields, as the MMC is another academically focused living-learning community (p. 343).

Another student also commented on the racial composition of a different LLC as mostly "Caucasian." She described it this way:

> Everything was super great in the beginning...It was 125 of us and we were all out-of-state students, so I came in through [a summer out-of-state program]. It was easy to relate to some people on that level like, "Oh, great. Everybody's out of state. We all are similar in that sense," but with the group of friends I went into in the fall, they were all Caucasian because the majority of them were just Caucasian in my summer program.

Both the MMC and the out-of-state LLC do not seek to bridge any academic gaps in incoming first-year students; as such, critique of liberalism is an important point to note here. Educational or programmatic interventions, such as the MMC, are designed to facilitate the transition to college for all students regardless of race. Such race-blind practices then perpetuate existing inequities, and potentially create further inequities as White students may have greater access to participating in such practices (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

The advisor working with the LLC makes a difference to the student experience; they can either be supportive or problematic. The MMC participant who had a positive experience reported comfort with and appreciation for her advisor:

> I feel like one of the things that has contributed to my success is being close to my advisor 'cause I don't feel hesitant to like reach out to him 'cause I do have him as a professor for class, so since we have...such a close bond. I do feel open to talk to him about, if I'm struggling in the class, or if I need help about something and whatnot.

In contrast, the RA had conflicts with her advisor in the STEM LLC:

> I'm the resident assistant... The faculty member that's a part of it, we don't talk about politics because I already know that he's going to probably say something that's racist. Dealing with that has been bad. He said stuff about different identities or different people and stuff like that so that has really bugged me.

The RA's experiences with this White faculty member exemplify the permanence of racism. The fact that the faculty member is allowed to hold such a position where they are tasked with building community and continue making problematic comments demonstrates Whiteness as property. Moreover, these racist encounters with a faculty member in the community are even detrimental because Inkelas et al. (2006) found that students in LLCs are more likely than those in traditional residence halls to connect with their faculty about topics "beyond" course-related issues and engage in "mentoring relationships" (p. 63). Because students encounter these various forms of racism in the community, the impact of a STEM LLC may actually dissuade students of color from pursuing a major and career in STEM. In turn, this impact would further inequities in the STEM disciplines.

Implications for Practice

While this study took place at one HWI, the experiences shared by these students are not unique to MSU. The studies that informed our literature review and the myriad of cases on social media are evidence of racism in the residence hall as a widespread issue. To this end, professional and student staff need to facilitate more intentional programming in residence halls that illuminates microaggressions and racist behaviors as well as provide opportunities for students to become more familiar with cultures other than their own. Intergroup dialogue has shown some success in this area (Claros et al., 2017). These dialogues would allow residents and staff to have conversations that transcend surface-level issues in addressing conflicts that consider the various matrices of oppression and privilege. Colleges and universities should also provide anti-racist training to faculty and staff who work in the residence halls. Using relevant scholarly literature, case studies, and student voices, trainers can elucidate racist language and behavior that is harmful to Black-identified individuals. Some of this programming and training should focus on anti-Black racism (Abrica et al., 2020), as many of the stories shared by our participants coincided with unfounded perceptions and stereotypes about Black people.

Implications for Policy

Given the findings of our study, institutions should consider implementing zero-tolerance policies for students who contribute to or create racially unjust environments in the residence halls. In the absence of such policies, students conclude that they do not have any agency in experiencing a positive climate in the residence halls. Conducting annual climate studies should also be a part of a policy agenda for the residence halls. Following these studies, housing departments should form committees to identify critical issues that need to be addressed and establish mechanisms for sharing the report with faculty, students, and staff. Crucially, departments must have a clearly defined strategy to review and implement tactics to improve climate based on the results of the data. According to Harper and Hurtado (2007), far too often, institutions collect climate data, and then do nothing with results.

Conclusion

This study shows that Black students are dealing with daily racialized trauma in the residence halls. Using CRT as a theoretical framework to analyze data from focus groups with 28 undergraduate students, we uncovered the ubiquitous nature of racism that disrupts the college-going experiences of Black students. Building upon previous studies, we integrated interpersonal and organizational elements that exhibited the various levels at which racism permeates residential experiences including roommates, RA roles, and living-learning communities. Given what we learned, if institutions are to

become the beacon for diversity, equity, and inclusion that they purport to be, they need to be more intentional about how they add(red)ress racism in campus spaces. As Harwood et al. (2018) argued "unwelcoming campus spaces do not appear accidentally; they are often the result of histories of racial exclusion and hostility" (p. 12). Hence, institutions must regularly assess how students of color are experiencing the campus culture and identify strategies to mitigate the harm being done to them. As one of our participants noted, Black students are paying the "same price" to study and live on college campuses, and it is irresponsible to disregard their academic pursuits by allowing everyday racism to continue. Additionally, as institutions of higher learning, it is the duty of institutional leaders to educate and facilitate opportunities for transformation along the lines of racial equity and inclusion.

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Corresponding Author: Tonisha B. Lane
Author Contact Information: tblane@vt.edu

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