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Black Boundary Lines:

Race, Class and Gender among Black Undergraduate Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology

by

Erica Marie Morales

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Black Boundary Lines:
Race, Class and Gender among Black Undergraduate Students

by

Erica Marie Morales

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Vilma Ortiz, Chair

Intra-group differences among Black undergraduate students remain understudied. To gain a more nuanced understanding of Black student life, we must examine how other social locations, like gender and class, connect to the racialized experiences of Black students. This dissertation argues that for Black students, class and gender, along with race, create boundaries that are simultaneously rigid and fluid and that need to be negotiated. I conducted sixty-two in-depth interviews with Black undergraduates at a large public university. First, I find similarities in the economic challenges faced by both low-income and lower middle-class students that demonstrate fluid class boundaries between the groups. In contrast, a more clear distinction exists between these groups and those from solidly middle-class backgrounds indicating rigid class boundaries. Next, I find that the severe underrepresentation of Black students in the university creates rigid boundaries around Black racial identity. Black students are expected by

their Black peers to be connected to the Black on-campus community via participating in Black student organizations, events and networks. Those that try to meet these expectations run the risk of being overburdened while others face difficulty in meeting these expectations. Black students employ negotiation strategies to deal with these tensions including stepping away from activities, saying “no” strategically, showing up when they can and avoiding predominantly Black spaces. Finally, I find that Black students regularly experience racial microaggressions from non-Black students and these microaggressions create rigid boundaries between them and Black students. Black students were seen as exotic, hypersexual and aggressive with variations on how these perceptions were directed at Black men and women. Black students were assumed to be low-income and from poor neighborhoods, regardless of their class background. Black students employed “equalization strategies” such as “beasting” or debating classmates, “being the best,” educating others, silence and humor to resist these microaggressions. This study demonstrates how boundaries are constructed within an institutional context and the significance of race, class and gender in the lives of Black students. These findings have important implications for Black student retention in higher education.

The dissertation of Erica Marie Morales is approved.

Walter Allen

Daniel Solórzano

Mignon Moore

Vilma Ortiz, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

*For the sixty-two students who gave their precious time and energy to share their stories with
me- you are an inspiration.*

And to my loving parents- this accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

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Acknowledgements

On a cold, rainy, fall day several years ago, I went to a local coffee shop to meet with one of my mentors for some advice. I was applying to graduate school but I remained very unsure of myself. I was a Puerto Rican young woman from the Bronx, N.Y.; attending a PHD program was far removed from my own background and community back home. I didn't know much about graduate school, I doubted whether graduate school was "for people like me" and questioned whether I should even apply. My mentor asked me, "Do you see yourself doing anything else?" I seriously considered the question and then answered "No. I want to conduct research on marginalized communities because these stories need to be told. I want to teach young adults about issues of race, class and gender so that they can become empowered agents of social change. I also want my research to benefit the communities that I study." Then, my mentor said to me, "Well, then you *have* to go on to graduate school." And, I knew she was right. I left the coffee shop thinking that someday, I wanted to be a mentor so when a tired, young person of color comes to see me with her own doubts about applying to graduate school, I will be able to support her through the process, like my mentor did for me.

That mentor was Stephanie Evans and I owe my pursuit of graduate studies in large part to her. That unforgettable conversation helped me to move forward and pursue my dream. I am forever thankful to her for her tremendous spirit, advice and encouragement. Another inspirational mentor at UMass was Agustin Lao-Montes. He showed me what it means to produce meaningful scholarship and be an effective teacher. I can not thank Agustin enough for his support and guidance throughout the graduate school application process. I credit my admission to several top graduate programs in sociology to him. Ventura Perez was also an

influential figure in my life at UMass. His course “Violence in American Culture” and involvement in the local community prompted me to participate in outreach efforts that truly enriched my experience as an undergraduate. It was also inspiring to see a person of color pursuing his own graduate work while simultaneously working towards social justice.

Upon arriving at UCLA, I was fortunate enough to connect with faculty mentors who helped to nurture and guide me through this long road of graduate school. They helped me to realize my own potential and capabilities despite my own doubts and insecurities. Vilma Ortiz has been my faculty advisor, rock of support and role model these past nine years at UCLA. She has been there with me to celebrate my successes and also pushed me through some tough challenges. She’s given me the space to be truly vulnerable and I’ve cried in her office more times than I count. Vilma’s always been there to pick me up off the floor, offer me encouragement and share with me her own stories of how she dealt with the pressures of being a graduate student and professor. She has also consistently provided structure and feedback on all of my work and helped me to achieve goals I never thought were possible. I see in Vilma all of the things that I want to be- her no-nonsense attitude, nurturing spirit, patience to explain and truly mentor others. I only hope to be that type of scholar, teacher and mentor one day. As a fellow Puerto Rican woman from New York, Vilma understood my background and where I was coming from; she saw not only Erica the scholar but Erica the person. For all this, I am forever grateful. I can honestly say that I don’t think I could have gotten through graduate school and achieved my PHD without her.

Another anchor in this graduate school process has been Walter Allen. Walter was particularly instrumental in my early years when I was trying to get adjusted to LA and figure out what this whole graduate school thing was about. I would always leave Walter’s office hours

“feeling like a million bucks.” He was incredibly supportive and encouraged me to pursue my research ideas. We had some great conversations about race and it was nice to see someone who was as passionate about these ideas as I was. Walter’s courses and willingness to teach courses on race when asked, demonstrate his commitment to this type of scholarship and support of students who pursue this work. Walter also provided me with a wonderful opportunity to assist with some focus groups he was conducting on the East Coast. I learned a lot from the experience and met some amazing scholars while on that trip. Finally, I appreciated Walter asking about my family whenever I saw him, reminding me that part of being a well-balanced scholar was remaining connected to one’s roots and the people that love you.

Daniel Solórzano played a pivotal role in my education as well. From the moment I took Danny’s course on minority experiences in education in my second year of graduate school, I was hooked. Danny inspired me with his love of ideas and pushed all of us to think about race and education in different ways. His desire for access, equity and social justice was infectious and in this course, I found myself at home for the first time while at UCLA. Danny was also incredibly generous with his time and I am thankful for every conversation about my dissertation work, including his ability to capture the “big picture” through drawing conceptual maps. It was through Danny’s involvement with UC/ACCORD that I first heard about this community of scholars doing critical work in education and I appreciated the opportunity to become an ACCORD fellow and share my work with other scholars. At this time, I’d like to extend a thank you to the sources that funded this dissertation: the University of California All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity (UC/ACCORD) and the UCLA Ralph Bunche Center for African American Studies.

Mignon Moore has provided great insight into this dissertation project and helped me to improve it, both methodologically and conceptually. Her knowledge of the field and research expertise has been invaluable in the development of this project. It has been a wonderful experience to connect with a leading scholar in the field of race, class, gender and sexuality; Mignon's vast knowledge and scholarship in the field have inspired my own work. I also appreciate the helpful feedback Mignon has provided on this dissertation as I move forward with my publication projects. I am especially thankful for Mignon's assistance with the job market process as well. She has shown me the power in being confident, asserting your position and truly knowing your worth. My goal is to "pay it forward" and pass on what I've learned from Mignon to other female faculty of color.

In addition to my committee members, I'd like to thank Min Zhou and Stefan Timmermans for their research feedback. In particular, I appreciate Min's time, energy and support while I was on the job market. Abigail Saguy and Jeff Decker provided me with great teaching opportunities at UCLA. Rebecca Emigh's course on grant writing helped me to strengthen my fellowship applications. Marlies Dietrich and Wendy Fujinami were always on hand to answer my questions and provide the right information when needed. A special thanks to Will, Mauricio and the rest of the custodial staff in Haines, Campbell and the other buildings where I spent my time. You kept the buildings looking clean and beautiful and it was nice to see a friendly face to chat with when I worked in the evenings.

My graduate school experience would not be complete without acknowledging the numerous friends I've made along the way. One important person in my life at UCLA has been La'Tonya Rease Miles, or LT as her friends and family affectionately call her. LT has been my guidepost and sounding board through these grad school years. She was always there to listen

and offer advice, reminding me that things are not always as serious as I make them out to be. She also helped me to realize the importance of asserting my own voice and scholar identity in the academy. It was great to know someone who had already “been through it” and achieved her PHD. LT’s passion for mentoring and supporting students connected in many ways with my own. In addition to our shared interests, LT and I could always share a good laugh whether it was on our road trips to the Bay area or watching reality/contestant T.V. shows. I am forever thankful to LT and her family (Rob, Jabari, Zoe and Gloria) for all of the love, support and meals they’ve supplied me with over the years. Given that my family was thousands of miles away on the East Coast, they became like a second family who made my time in LA very special.

Speaking of second homes, I also have to acknowledge the place where I first met LT- the graduate mentoring office. The “office” as it came to be known was an escape for me in many ways. It was here that I felt like I could really be me, surrounded by amazing graduate students of color who ate, breathed and slept social justice. We had a mission to support undergraduate students on their pathway to graduate school and so many transformative programs and events took place while I was there. The office helped me to develop a healthy and balanced relationship with the academy. I learned that I could pursue rigorous scholarship that had meaningful effects and implications for communities. A special shout-out to the GMP crew- you know who you are.

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McNair scholars I've worked with over the years. There were many tough days in graduate school and these students' drive and determination to pursue meaningful research and "transform the academy" was inspiring and rejuvenating. Mentoring was a huge part of my life at UCLA and I appreciate the opportunity to participate in something I truly love to do.

In my recent years in graduate school, the friends I've made in the UCLA sociology department have become very important people in my life. I didn't know that the day I was assigned an office space on campus was the day I would meet a person who would become one of my closest friends at UCLA- Anthony Ocampo. Anthony and I have both shared a lot of joy and tough times together and through it all, we've always supported and looked out for each other. I've learned a lot from Anthony about the inner workings of the academy and he has helped me develop some of the tools that I needed to navigate through graduate school. I also really valued our conversations about presence and spirituality. I will always admire his ability to let loose and have fun and we've had a lot of great times these past few years.

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Vita

Erica Marie Morales

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Morales, Erica (July 2008) “How to Conduct Qualitative Research.” Guest Lecture for the Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles (Invited by Veronica Terriquez), Los Angeles, CA.

Morales, Erica (April 2008) “Crossing the Line: The Factors that affect African American and Latino Friendships and Romantic Relationships,” Tenth Annual Chicago Ethnography Conference at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois. (accepted but was unable to attend)

Morales, Erica (Feb. 2008) “Undergraduate Research and the First-Year Experience” Presented at the Annual Meeting of the First-Year Experience Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Morales, Erica (March 2007) “Crossing the Line: The Factors that affect African American and Latino Friendships and Romantic Relationships,” Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association Conference, Oakland, CA.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 2006, fewer than 100 African American freshmen *chose* to enroll at the university. The entire university community came together to meet this challenge and as a result, African American freshmen enrollment has doubled. Today the first students to benefit from these efforts are about to graduate. They are appreciative of all that's been done for them- and even more determined to pass the legacy on to those that follow.

“The Faces of Change” (*UCLA Magazine*- 2011, by Jack Feuer)

This excerpt from the *UCLA Magazine* (Feuer, 2011) refers to the enrollment crisis that took place at the university in 2006. As the article states, less than one hundred Black¹ freshmen enrolled at UCLA that fall. Many student groups, activists and organizations such as the Black Alumni Association were outraged at the “low numbers ”of Black students coming to the university and called for more Black students on campus. Media attention poured over this issue labeling Black student enrollment at UCLA a “crisis.” Ninety-six Black students in the freshman class is a particularly small number of Blacks for a public institution. Los Angeles County has the second largest population of Blacks nationally (after Cook County in Chicago) so a larger number of Black students would have been expected (U.S. Census, 2010). This is an important issue as higher education serves as a pathway towards social mobility.

The sudden drop in Black student enrollment exacerbated an already brewing enrollment crisis. Black student enrollment at UCLA has always been low, and when Proposition 209—banning affirmative action in California—came into effect in 1998, the university's Black student population dropped even further (144 Black freshmen enrolled that year compared to a freshman class of 4,200). After Proposition 209, the admissions numbers of Black students

¹ The term Black is used throughout this dissertation to refer to students of African descent throughout the diaspora including those whose ethnic background may be Black American, West Indian or from a country on the African continent (e.g. Nigerian, Ethiopian).

decreased by sixty five percent despite the university having received more Black applicants than any other UC campus (Watford and Comeaux, 2006). In 2006, the number drops to less than 100 Black freshmen enrolled out of 4,809 freshmen. This was the tipping point that drew attention over the Black student enrollment crisis.

Black students, alumni and community members rallied together to fight for access to the university for Black students and, in 2007, Black enrollment increases to around 200 students. A few years later, an article out in UCLA magazine, titled “The Faces of Change,” (Feuer, 2011) profiled the students of the 2007 freshmen class. The excerpt above states that ninety-six Black students “chose” to enroll at UCLA in the fall of 2006 (Feuer, 2011). To imply that there is choice in applying, gaining admission and attending UCLA ignores severe inequalities in access to higher education that impact many Black communities and the effect of prop 209 on Black applicants. The article also champions the university as the vehicle behind these changes when this same institutional structure has contributed to this issue in the first place. “The Faces of Change”(Feuer, 2011) article tokenizes this group of Black students as the ones that are going to bring diversity to the campus and alleviate the enrollment crisis. The article even states that they are “even more determined to pass the legacy on to those that follow” (Feuer, 2011). This places the responsibility on Black students to engage in outreach to bring other Black students to campus instead of the university taking on this work.

While celebrating the enrollment increase, this article ignores the continuing crisis at the university that demands attention. Enrollment remains drastically low. Two hundred Black students in a freshman class of over 4,000 is problematic. Moreover, the students in the article are depicted as “problem-free” as if access to the university was the only issue they faced. This led me to wonder how Black students attending the university were actually doing given this

context. Many universities like UCLA have been affected by affirmative action bans and the enrollment of Black students has dropped dramatically in these places as well so these are pressing issues affecting many higher education institutions.

More specifically, I became interested in the role of social locations within this context. Higher educational research has largely treated Black students as a monolithic group and assumed that all Black students share similar experiences. New scholarship has begun to question the homogenizing of Blacks in educational research (Harper et al. 2007; Cuyjet, 2006; Fries-Britt, 1998). Scholars assert that important intra-group differences among Black students create variations in experience such as class and gender. Studies examining the diverse experiences of Black students are needed. I arrived at the question: How might social locations such as class and gender shape Black student experiences on campus?

This dissertation argues that race, class and gender work together to create boundaries among Black students that are simultaneously rigid and fluid. These boundaries pose challenges that must be negotiated and renegotiated throughout their time on campus. There are several gaps in the literature that this dissertation seeks to address. Prior work has examined how Blacks construct boundaries in neighborhood contexts (Lacy, 2007; Jackson, 2001). However, these works do not look at the role of formalized institutions in creating boundaries. Willie's (2003) work examines the college context as a setting where a negotiation between students and the institution occurs. But Willie neglects to conduct a systematic analysis of social locations and she does not show how the social locations that operate within an institutional context affect students. Previous work has analyzed the racialized experiences of Black students in higher education (Solórzano et al. 2000; Allen, 1992). However, these works focus solely on racism and do not explore other ways that race and in particular, racial identity, might manifest at the

university for Black students. This body of work also has not systematically examined the role of other social locations such as class and gender in shaping student experiences.

Literature Review

Racialization at Historically White Universities

Due to the gains made during the Civil Rights Movement, many Blacks started entering predominantly white colleges and universities in larger numbers at the end of the 1960's (Peterson et al. 1978). This unprecedented change in the racial diversity of our campus' student bodies raised questions about how Black students would negotiate and ultimately succeed in an educational environment from where they had been previously excluded. In addition, these campuses were not necessarily adequately equipped to meet the needs of Black students (Peterson, et al. 1978). When examining the experiences of Black students at predominantly white universities, researchers found that Black students felt racially isolated and segregated (Thomas et al.1981; Allen, 1981). Students encountered faculty who seemed disinterested in their academic learning, failed to encourage them and graded them unfairly (Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1992). Campus race relations were often perceived as negative due to interactions with faculty and students.

Black students often experienced direct hostility aimed at them from white students and, as a result, they were excluded from student organizations and activities except for those specifically involving the Black population on campus (Fleming, 1984). All of these issues work to create a sense of invisibility for Black students on campus. This alienation and tension worked to create a hostile campus climate for Black students (Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1992). These aspects of campus life that were experienced so negatively by Black students worked to suppress academic performance (Allen, 1981).

Yet, the conclusions from this body of literature were optimistic. It was expected that institutions of higher learning can and should respond to these issues (Peterson et al., 1978; Allen, 1981). Scholars recommended the hiring of more Black faculty and staff members, increasing financial aid, admitting a critical mass of Black students with a balanced sex ratio, and establishing curricula relevant to the Black experience, and creating responsive counseling services. In addition, scholars also called for eliminating barriers to college access and persistence such as culturally biased and standardized entrance exams, intense academic competition, and “the exclusionary nature of campus life that did not allow for racial and other forms of diversity” (Allen, 1992).

Some colleges and universities made efforts to implement these changes (Peterson et al. 1978). Yet economic downturns led to decreases in financial aid, and rising conservative backlash led to eliminating affirmative action in many states in the 1990’s, took a toll on the education of Black undergraduate students (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Carroll et al. 2000; Solórzano et al. 2000). College campuses were now more legally and financially restricted from implementing meaningful changes that could help Black students. As a result, Black students continued to experience many of the same issues, such as alienation and isolation from the larger campus community that researchers had uncovered in previous studies. In more recent studies, Black students experienced alienation and isolation in classroom interactions (Solórzano et al. 2000; Carroll et al. 2000). Stereotypes about Blacks were often invoked in the classroom and Black students were made to feel as though they were the sole representative of their race, often times trying to negate these stereotypes and educate white students (Solórzano et al. 2000; Carroll et al. 2000).

In addition, Chavous et al. (2004) found that Black students encountered a great deal of racism in the classroom, particularly in courses they took for their major. In many cases, Black students felt that they had to work extra hard to prove their academic worth and some students even began to internalize these stereotypes (Torres and Charles, 2004). These issues often resulted in students dropping classes and leaving majors (Solórzano, 2000). Consistent with some of the earlier works on relationships with whites, Black students often continued to have negative interactions with white students, faculty and staff (Gossett et al. 1998; Feagin et al. 1996). Students often felt unwelcome on white campuses (Solórzano et al. 2000; Gossett, 1998) and invisible (Feagin et al. 1996), and when they did receive attention, it was typically in a negative manner such as extra scrutiny at social events (Solórzano, 2000). Moreover, campus policies were often not up-to-date to reflect the changing diversity on our college campuses (Gossett et al. 1998).

Scholars have coined the term racial microaggressions to include interactions such as being heavily scrutinized to being made invisible to subtle insults. These affect the academic and social life of Black students and other groups of color on predominantly white campuses (Solórzano, 2000). White students often remain ignorant to the racial microaggressions that Black students have to contend with on a daily basis and as a result, they often minimize the sense of alienation that Black students experience (Yosso et al. 2004; Gossett et al. 1998). These microaggressions and lack of understanding from whites justify the need for counter spaces such as Black student organizations, Black residence halls and Black study halls that provide safe environments for students to feel more comfortable both academically and socially (Torres and Charles, 2004; Solórzano, 2000, Gossett et al. 1998). White students often criticize Black

students for “self segregating” without acknowledgement of their own white spaces (Torres and Charles, 1994).

Given all of the issues that continue to affect Black students on predominantly white campuses today, scholars have recognized the importance of having a critical mass of Black students, faculty and staff (Carroll et al. 2000) in particular to protect against racial microaggressions (Solórzano, 2000). The shrinking of this critical mass due to the eradication of affirmative action in many states depletes diverse perspectives in the campus community (Carroll et al. 2000). It also significantly impacts people of color (Carroll et al. 2000). Black students not only face a campus climate that has traditionally been hostile to their presence but now encounter a space in which they are often fewer in number leading to further alienation and isolation. Conservative backlash against affirmative action has led to greater contestation by white students, staff and faculty over the place of Black students on these campuses as well.

These studies illustrate the racial hostility that Black students endure through interactions and in spaces dominated by Whites at the university. This racial hostility is rooted in how Blackness is viewed and conceptualized by the dominant society. Blacks are ascribed an inferior status in U.S society and this translates over into the ways in which they are treated by whites in a variety of settings including the university. They are made to feel as though they do not belong because in the eyes of many White students, staff and faculty they do not simply because of there being Black. In this body of literature, we get a sense of how society’s view of race, and more specifically how the perception of Blackness affects the lives of Black students in a predominantly white university.

Moreover, race may be particularly salient at colleges and universities given our national climate today. Students are pursuing higher education in the post civil rights era where notions

of equality and fairness abound. However, numerous scholars have proven that racism is indeed, alive and well but it operates in a covert manner (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Feagin and Sikes, 1994; Omi and Winant, 1994). Racism can be so subtle and couched in certain types of language and attitudes that scholars are now calling it color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Two particularly important ways that color-blind racism is conveyed are through the ideas of abstract liberalism and naturalization (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). The first involves speaking about liberalism in a decontextualized manner (e.g. “I oppose affirmative action because everyone is entitled to the same opportunities”). The second is through naturalizing and normalizing practices such as residential segregation (“all people naturally want to live around others who are like them”) (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

These concepts are not only pervasive throughout society more generally but they are also found throughout many college campuses in the United States that traditionally carry the reputation of being more “liberal” (Yosso et al. 2004). Black students find themselves in an environment where color-blind racism is subtly conveyed through these frames whether it is through anti-affirmative action editorials in the campus newspaper to rationalizing racial segregation on campus as “natural” (Yosso et al. 2004). Within the campus context and given the larger societal ethos today, Black students are compelled to consider what it means to be Black and the role that it plays in their lives.

Class in Higher Education

Higher education research has tended to focus solely on the challenges low-income students encounter at the university (Thayer, 2000; Mortenson, 2000; Donovan, 1984). Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to earn a BA by the age of 24, less likely to attend college full-time, and more likely to work full-time while in college (Tinto, 2006; Mortenson,

2000). Many low-income students are also first-generation college students (Rendon, 1995). Low-income and first-generation college students are most at risk of departing from the university prior to degree completion due to lack of knowledge of the campus environment, lack of adequate academic preparation, and lack of family support (Thayer, 2000). While significant numbers of Black and other students of color are from low-income backgrounds (Rendon, 1995; Donovan, 1984), many are not (Tinto, 2006). Many Black students are from lower middle-class and solidly middle-class backgrounds and few studies have examined their experiences within higher education (Torres, 2009). The lower middle-class tends to struggle financially and is often only a few paychecks away from poverty (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds may struggle with affording their college education.

It has been well documented that Black undergraduate students face financial challenges as they strive to obtain a higher education (Chen and DesJardins, 2010; Long and Riley, 2007; St. John et al. 2005). However, we do not know what these challenges look like for Black students of different class backgrounds. In fact, comparisons by class within the Black student population have rarely been done in prior studies. Research utilizing a comparative framework is necessary in order to capture the types of challenges Black students experience. Moreover, most prior studies have been quantitative, so a study drawing on qualitative methods, specifically in-depth interview data, will better grasp the nuances of student experience.

Gender

Black men encounter expectations of hegemonic masculinity in our society that are difficult for them to meet (Collins, 2005). The dominant, hegemonic notion of masculinity in our society privileges affluent, heterosexual white men. It allows them to dominate women and exercise male authority and requires that they control their emotions and be heterosexual

(Collins, 2005). Black men are not afforded the same avenues as White men to assert their masculinity, yet their masculinity is also feared. Because of this fear, Black men often have their masculinity “policed.”

This policing often takes place in educational settings and it is encountered quite early. Black men experience policing of their masculinity throughout their time in the educational pipeline and it continues after high school into adulthood. As children, Black boys try to adhere to dominant notions of masculinity, yet their behavior is often misinterpreted by others. Black boys’ behavior in schools, for example is often seen as adultified; that is, their actions are viewed as being that of a fully cognizant, rational adult rather than that of a developing child (Ferguson, 2000). Their behavior is often demonized and criminalized by teachers and school administrators yielding harsher punishments than it would for a young white boy.

This type of labeling and treatment follows Black males throughout the schooling process. Nancy Lopez (2004) found that Black Dominican male adolescents in high school were kept under constant surveillance and viewed as disruptive in the classroom. The incarceration and racial profiling of large numbers of Black men tell us that these societal views about Black men being seen as “threats” have serious societal consequences (Rios, 2006; Butterfield, 2004). Black men at UCLA are likely to experience this type of labeling throughout their schooling process and possibly in college as well. Black men are often the targets of campus police because they are seen as threats in public spaces (Smith et al. 2007; Solórzano et al. 2000).

In contrast to hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic femininity requires that women they be not like men and maintain an appropriate feminine appearance and demeanor (Collins, 2005). Women must also be submissive and docile in their relationships with men (Collins, 2005). Similar to hegemonic masculinity, this notion of femininity is built on whiteness and thus

excludes Black women (Collins, 2005). Black women have historically been characterized as “difficult” and “controlling” (Collins, 2005). Although these stereotypes about Black women are pervasive in today’s society, they are often seen as less threatening than Black men so they are not subject to as much “policing.” In recent studies of Black women’s experiences in high school, Black women were seen as less threatening than Black men and reported fewer problems with teachers (Lopez, 2002, Carter, 2001). As a result, they continue to surpass Black men in educational attainment and perform better in school achieving higher grade point averages than their male counterparts (Lopez, 2002; Carter, 2001).

Scholars have recently attempted to probe into why Black women tend to outperform Black males in school. It has been suggested that particular behaviors students are expected to perform in school such as sitting still and paying attention in class are feminized actions (Burke, 1989). Society socializes women to behave in this way whereas men are socialized differently. But Carter (2001) found that, for Black and Latina women, acting too “soft” in school was not desirable and many performed traditional masculine behaviors. Much like the men of color, these women utilized these behaviors to survive living in poor, under-resourced neighborhoods. These behaviors have extended into college with some Black women exhibiting tough personas as defense mechanisms (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990). Despite Black women (particularly those of poor and working class backgrounds) having been found to perform some traditionally masculine behaviors (Carter, 2001), they may still be perceived by their teachers and school administrators as less threatening because they are female.

The aforementioned research studies may explain why Black women greatly outnumber Black men at UCLA. These gendered expectations are likely to follow Black women throughout their time at the university. Because they are perceived as less threatening and exhibit some

feminized behaviors, Black women are allowed more space at the university to pursue their studies (as compared to their male counterparts). However, just because Black women's presence at the university may be tolerated to some extent does not mean that it is welcome. This becomes apparent in classroom settings where stereotypical comments are made about "welfare queens" and Black female promiscuity (Lopez, 2002). Black women still continue to be objectified even in educational settings. Moreover, the stereotype of Black women as "angry, difficult and controlling" is still widely held in our society. These stereotypes can affect the experiences of Black women at UCLA and other college campuses as well.

Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality and Boundaries

Critical race theory informs this study. Critical race theory has five tenets that include examining the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, the challenge to dominant ideology, the commitment to social justice, the centrality of experiential knowledge and the transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001; Solórzano et al. 2000). In this work, I focus on the importance of race, class and gender in shaping the experiences of Black students at the university. This centralizes race, class and gender in my work and challenges color-blind and post-racial ideologies that would argue that these social locations are not significant in the lives of Black students. By documenting the role of race, class and gender at the university through student narratives, I promote social justice by highlighting critical issues of inequality and make central the voices of students. Finally, I ground this study in research from a variety of disciplines including sociology and education.

Further, I draw on intersectionality because it posits that race, class and other social locations *work together* to structure systems of power and oppression within our society (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2005; Davis, 2008). I draw on intersectionality to analyze the various

ways students' positionalities are situated via race, class and gender and how that affects their perceptions and experiences within their narratives. Both theories shed light on how the intersection of race, class and gender within the structure of higher education can create academic, economic and social challenges for Black students.

I also draw on the concept of rigid boundaries. Zerubavel (1993) describes rigid boundaries as ignoring differences within a group and marking the entire group as all the same. This often results in stereotypes such as those based on race or ethnicity (Zerubavel, 1993). Black students at UCLA are likely to experience racial microaggressions that are connected to class and gender. These microaggressions can be thought of as a boundary-making process, non-Black students and faculty making differentiations between themselves and Blacks students and treating them negatively as a result. There are also boundaries that people create within groups to distinguish themselves. Lacy (2007) found that upper middle-class Blacks perceived boundaries between themselves and lower-class Blacks. Black students at UCLA may also engage in boundary-work, creating distinctions as to who is a part of the Black community and who is not. We can think of racial microaggressions and the internal boundary-work within the Black community as rigid boundaries. These rigid boundaries sharply differentiate between groups or within groups and are difficult to traverse.

Boundaries can also be fluid as well. Jackson (2001) reveals that the Black middle class and low-income Blacks are not easily differentiated. People often move up and down the class ladder over time. Moreover, Blacks from different class groups are not often geographically segregated (Jackson, 2001). They live in the same neighborhoods and work right near each other. This tends to facilitate social relationships across class groups (Jackson, 2001). Jackson's (2001) findings reveal the fluid boundaries within segments of the Black community. This fluidity may

apply particularly to low-income Blacks and the Black lower middle-class. Like Jackson, other scholars have also found that low-income Blacks and the Black lower middle-class share close residential and social connections (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). These fluid class boundaries may also apply to Black students in higher education, impacting the types of financial challenges that Black students experience and how they perceive their Black peers.

Methods

This study draws on sixty-two in-depth interviews (thirty-two Black men and thirty Black women) conducted between February 2009 and May 2009 with self-identified Black undergraduate students at UCLA. UCLA is an interesting place to conduct this study. It is a predominantly White and Asian university with a unique history and relationship with the Black community. Historically, it has educated such notable figures as Ralph Bunche, Arthur Ashe and Congresswoman Diane Watson. Yet, it also has been greatly impacted by Prop. 209 and now it appears as an institution where Black access has been severely limited. Moreover, the admission of Black students continues to be a contested issue. In 2007, UCLA professor Tim Groseclose made allegations that the university's changed admissions policy resulted in "unqualified" Black students being admitted to the campus (Mehta, 2008). Like many other campuses in the UC system, UCLA continues to struggle with admissions, admitting and enrolling a small percentage of Black students (Watford and Commeaux, 2006). University administrators, faculty and students have been working to develop strategies in order to increase access for Black students making the findings of this study particularly critical to these efforts.

Selection Criteria

Respondents were selected based on the following criteria: racial identification and length of time spent at the university. I recruited students based on their self-identification as

Black. Acknowledging the tremendous diversity within the Black community consisting of people hailing from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, skin colors and physical characteristics, I chose to not racially categorize anyone based on appearance but selected participants for this study based on how they perceive themselves. Some students self-identified as Black and/or biracial with a Black background. Due to the increasing numbers of interracial relationships and marriages between Blacks and Whites, recent generations of young people are born from these unions and some identify with both parts of their background. Students who identify as biracial with a Black background were included in the study. Given the California context, there were several students who were Black and Latino or Black and Asian. They were also included in the study. In total, thirteen students who had mixed ancestry participated in this study. All of them identified as Black or as Biracial with Black ancestry.

In addition, immigrant Blacks from various African nations and the West Indies, for example were excluded from this study given that they have spent a significant amount of time residing in places outside the United States. The children of immigrant Blacks (2nd generation) however, were included in this study. Although their ethnic background is different than that of U.S. African Americans, they are still often racialized as Black American by society (Waters, 1999). Because of this racialization process, many children of Black immigrants racially identify, and in some cases ethnically identify, with African Americans (Waters, 1999). A total of eight students had at least one parent who was an African or West Indian immigrant. All of them were born in the United States except for one student who was born in Nigeria but came to the U.S. at the age of four. All of the students identified as Black.

Students were also selected based on the length of time that they spent at the university: all participants completed at least one year at UCLA. This means that the study excluded

freshmen students but current sophomores, juniors (except for new transfers) and seniors were eligible. The reason for this criteria is that students who spent a minimum of one year at the university were able to become acclimated to the campus, get a sense of what the racial politics were like between racial groups and among Black students here and be able to comment on their experiences. The sample includes a fair mixture of sophomores, juniors and seniors. No one group is strongly over-represented. There were no set age criteria for this research project although I targeted students who were of traditional college going age ranging from 18-30. The majority of students were between 18-30. I interviewed one transfer student who was in her late 30's. I had a total of thirteen transfer students in the sample, many of whom were from low-income backgrounds.

I also included Black student-athletes in the sample. They make up a significant portion of the Black student population on campus so it is important to capture their experiences. In total, I interviewed eleven student-athletes. Five of these student-athletes were women and six were men. Many of the student-athletes were from low-income backgrounds so this added more economic diversity to the sample. In some ways, their experiences were different than of non-athletes raising several key issues about how they see themselves in relation to non-athlete Black students and how they remain connected to the larger Black student community on campus.

Comparison Groups

Students were selected based on their class and gender. Both Black male and female students were selected to participate in this study and their class background (that of their family will be considered here given the young age of the respondents) fell into low-income, lower middle class or solidly middle class categories. To determine the socioeconomic background of participants, each student was asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire (e.g.,

parent's educational level, income, current occupation, home ownership and family make-up).

During the in-depth interviews, I asked more detailed questions about class background. I use the demographic questionnaires and interview data to sort students by three class categories: solidly middle-class, lower middle-class and low-income. I have developed the following definitions for these categories:

Solidly middle-class: Student had parents who earned \$61,000+ combined income (the U.S. Census defines the median household income in California at \$61,000), a high level of education (bachelor's degree or above) and employed in professional jobs. Parents typically had extra money to spend on leisure activities and family outings.

Lower middle-class: Student had parents who earned between \$31,000-\$61,000 combined income, obtained an associate's or technical degree or had taken classes at a community college and they were largely employed in sales or clerical positions. Parents' incomes were not high enough to ensure household stability so that families were barely able to pay bills and had little money left over at the end of each month.

Low-income: Student had parents who earned \$30,000 or less combined income, obtained a high school diploma or lower, and were unemployed or working in low-wage jobs. Families might have even been on public assistance for an extended period of time.

The breakdown of the numbers were as follows: A total of sixty-two Black students were interviewed, thirty-two men and thirty women. Twenty-four students were from solidly middle-class backgrounds, twenty-two students were from lower middle-class backgrounds and sixteen students were from low-income backgrounds.

Sampling and Recruitment

Given the small population of Black students on campus (2%), I mostly recruited participants for the study through snowball sampling. I had built relationships with several Black students on campus who I planned on interviewing for the project and I asked them to refer me to other Black students who they thought might be interested in participating. I also asked them to “spread the word” more generally about my project to others and I provided my contact information that they could distribute to any interested students. Moreover, at the end of each interview I asked students if they knew of anyone else who might be interested in participating and provided them with information that they could pass along to others.

In addition to snowball sampling, I attended an event put on by the Afrikan Student Union (ASU) called “Dissed By My Own Kind.” The event was a forum for Black students to discuss issues among various sectors of the Black student population (e.g. men and women, LGBT students, student-athletes, transfer students). Since the goal of this event was to bring different groups of Black students together, I thought it might be a good way to make contact with diverse students. I knew some students at the event and they brought me around to introduce me to other students. I spoke with several students about my project. From this event, I was able to recruit some students to interview.

I also knew some Black student leaders on campus who held positions in the Afrikan Student Union and other groups on campus. They talked about my project to some of the students that they knew and offered to email a recruitment flyer to their group listserves. Some students responded to the flyer and emailed me asking for more information about the interview. From this recruitment technique, I was able to recruit a few interview participants.

Interview Questions and Analysis

The use of in-depth interviews allows me to gather in-depth information about the everyday lived experiences of students (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Interviews ranged between one and a half to three hours in length. They were conducted in a private office space on the UCLA campus. Interviews consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions that asked students about several issues including: their financial concerns (e.g. how they pay for their college expenses and the challenges they face in doing so), connection with their Black peers (impressions and interactions with them), involvement within campus life such as Black student organizations (e.g., their role within the groups, positive experiences and challenges that they have faced) and experiences with non-Black peers and faculty (e.g. what have your experiences been like with White, Latino and Asian students, describe a memorable experience with a faculty member).

All sixty-two interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. I employ an inductive approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1999) to data analysis where I examined and coded the transcripts for emerging themes with the assistance of Dedoose, a web-based, qualitative analysis program. Next, I examined the transcripts again, breaking down each larger theme into several sub-themes. This captured the subtleties and nuances in students' experiences. After the sub-themes had been established, I sorted the transcripts by class and gender. In each of these sortings, I analyzed the transcripts for commonalities and differences in themes and sub-themes by the different class and gender groups.

Outline of Dissertation Chapters

My dissertation argues that race, class and gender work to create boundaries that are simultaneously rigid and fluid. These boundaries pose challenges for Black students that they have to negotiate in their everyday lives. In each chapter I take on a different social location,

examining how it shapes boundaries for Black students. Then, I look at how these boundaries challenge Black students at the university and how they deal with these challenges in their everyday lives.

In Chapter 2, I focus on how class shapes the lives of Black students at UCLA. I compare the experiences of Black students from low-income, lower middle-class and solidly middle-class backgrounds. I examine the types of financial challenges that Black students experience, how they make meaning of their class background and perceive their Black peers from different class groups. I find that financial instability links Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds with those from low-income backgrounds. While this shared financial instability works to unite low-income and lower middle-class students, it also serves to create social distance between these students and those from the solidly middle-class. Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds have financial privilege compared to these other groups making their experiences on campus qualitatively different.

In Chapter 3, I focus on how the university context creates rigid boundaries of expectations of Black racial identity. Due to the small number of Black students at UCLA, the main expectation that Black students encounter is that they should be connected to the Black community and “give back.” I analyze how some students are able to meet these expectations of connection while others face constraints in doing so. I also show how some students are uncomfortable with forming connections to the Black student community due to their pre-college experiences growing up. I discuss how these expectations of Black racial identity are rooted in notions of racial authenticity. Finally, I illustrate the tensions around these expectations. Many students faced difficulty in meeting these expectations and as a result, they had to strategically

negotiate them. These strategies are often ways of preserving their racial authenticity while balancing their academic and social commitments.

In Chapter 4, I focus on racial microaggressions, or subtle, racialized insults and how they intersect with class and gender to shape Black students' experiences at the university. Non-Black students and faculty utilize racial microaggressions as a way of instituting rigid boundaries between them and Black students. I find that Black students encountered gendered microaggressions where they were perceived as exotic, hypersexual and aggressive. However, these microaggressions operated differently for men and women. In terms of class, Black students experienced assumptions that they were low-income and from poor neighborhoods, regardless of class background. In addition, Black students also encountered racial microaggressions about their intellectual ability and admission to the university that worked to alienate them from the rest of the campus community. These microaggressions can work to influence Black student's sense of belonging on campus and create racial battle fatigue. Finally, I discuss how Black students draw on equalization strategies (Lamont and Fleming, 2005) to respond and resist these racial microaggressions.

In Chapter 5, I highlight the key findings from the dissertation. I address how my findings fill in significant research gaps in the areas of racial identity, class and gender as it pertains to Black students in higher education. I show how many findings connect with some of the broader themes across the chapters and how they speak to the literature on race, class and gender in education. I also discuss the practical implications of this work. This may prompt college administrators and faculty to consider the ways that we can better serve Black students in higher education. I conclude the chapter with discussing future directions of research in this area.

Chapter 2

From Poverty to Privilege: How Class Influences the Experiences of Black Undergraduate Students

How does class influence the experiences of Black undergraduate students at a public research university? In 2004, fifty three percent of Black students graduated from high school in California and only ten percent earned a B.A. from a UC, CSU or an independent institution (Allen et al. 2009). This leak in the academic pipeline warrants further exploration to uncover the issues Black students face in accessing and persisting through higher education. One particularly pressing concern is that of class and how it shapes the lives of Black students within the university. For example, in the fall of 2006, freshman D’Juan Farmer commuted daily by bus two hours from his parent’s home in impoverished Compton, CA to the well-resourced campus of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), (Hayasaki, 2006). D’Juan underwent this long commute because he was ineligible for financial aid because his parent’s income was too high. Yet, the family resources were insufficient to allow him to live on campus. Like D’Juan, many Black students from lower middle class backgrounds are left without much financial aid and are solely responsible for their college expenses. These issues can ultimately affect college access and retention for Black students.

Literature Review

Scholars have found that research has largely treated Black students in higher education as a homogeneous group and has assumed that all Black students share similar experiences (Harper, 2007; Cuyjet, 2006; Fries-Britt, 1998). These scholars point out that there are important intra-group differences among Black students that create variations in experience (Harper, 2007; Cuyjet, 2006; Fries-Britt, 1998). Thus, more exhaustive and rigorous studies of various

subpopulations of Black students are needed to further explore these different experiences. This work may be particularly important given the under-representation, low retention and low graduation rates of Black students (Harper, 2006; Person and Christensen, 1996; Allen, 1992). In California, Black students continue to be “excluded and underserved” from the state’s higher education system (Allen et al. 2009). Given that Black students are so poorly represented among the undergraduate population and severely under-resourced at the university, it is important that researchers examine the issues that are most pertinent for Black students. One such issue is class. However, few studies have examined how class influences the experiences of Black undergraduate students in higher education (Torres, 2009).

Current scholarship has tended to focus solely on the challenges Black low-income students encounter at the university (Willie, 2003; Smith and Moore, 2000; Allen, 1992). Few studies have examined how class influences the experiences of Black students from lower middle-class and solidly middle-class backgrounds. Yet, recent neighborhood studies by sociologists Pattillo-McCoy (1999) and Lacy (2007), underscore important differences between the solidly middle and lower middle-class, a major one being that the Black lower middle-class lacks financial stability compared to the Black solidly middle-class. Solidly middle-class Black families are economically secure, they occupy higher paying, professional occupations and they reside in areas far removed from low-income Black communities (Lacy, 2007). In contrast, Blacks who occupy a lower middle-class status are less financially stable, occupy lower paying jobs and tend to live adjacent to Black low-income neighborhoods (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). The issues that affect Black low-income communities including under-funded resources and inferior schools often spill over into Black lower middle-class neighborhoods as well.

This financial instability can also extend into higher education, influencing the ways Black lower middle-class and low-income students experience financial challenges. Prior research has found that Black students often encounter difficulties paying for their college expenses while at the university (Chen and DesJardins, 2010; Long and Riley, 2007; St. John et al. 2005). Few studies have examined how Black students from different class groups experience these challenges. Given the economically vulnerable backgrounds of Black low-income and lower middle-class students, it is likely that both of these groups encounter considerable financial difficulty affording their college expenses. These challenges may look different for both groups. Lower middle-class students might receive less financial aid than those from low-income backgrounds impacting their ability to pay for costs like tuition and housing. Low-income students might receive more aid due to their background that can cover more of their college expenses.

However, these students might also be responsible for economically supporting their family members that places a heavy financial burden upon them. Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds may be more financially stable and able to afford their college expenses. With increasing budget cuts impacting many university campuses, most of these students, even those from solidly middle-class backgrounds, may feel the effects. My dissertation analyzes how Black students from low-income, lower middle-class and solidly middle-class backgrounds experience these financial challenges.

Class can also affect how Black students perceive one another. Prior research has examined the tensions between Black students of upper class and low-income backgrounds (Willie, 2003). Scholars have also found that Black students from low-income backgrounds feel less close towards Black middle class students (Smith and Moore, 2000). What is missing from

these works is a comparison between more than two class groups. Research has recently focused on the Black lower middle-class (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). We do not know how the Black lower middle-class might perceive those Black students who are more privileged than them (the solidly middle-class) and those who are less privileged than them (low-income). The financial instability of Black students from the lower middle-class may cause them to feel more similar to their peers from low-income backgrounds. In addition, the perceptions of Black students from the solidly middle-class need to be explored. Research has largely focused on the perceptions that Black students from low-income backgrounds have of Black middle-class students (Willie, 2003; Smith and Moore, 2000). It is unclear how those Black students from the solidly middle-class view students from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds. My dissertation analyzes how Black students in all three of these class groups perceive one another.

This chapter also examines how Black students from low-income, lower middle-class and solidly middle-class backgrounds make meaning of their class background. Prior research has analyzed how middle and upper middle-class Blacks draw meaning from their background and establish class based identities (Lacy, 2007). Lacy (2007) found that middle class Blacks draw distinctions between themselves and Black low-income communities while upper middle-class Blacks create boundaries between themselves and the Black middle class. Few studies have examined how Black students make meaning of their class background in higher education. In a higher education context, Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds may see themselves as different from the low-income and lower middle-class and subsequently draw meaning from their privilege.

In Lacy's (2007) study, these class distinctions were rather sharp. In a public university, the way students think about their class background and erect boundaries between one another

may not be as sharp given that there is considerable class diversity in this setting. Moreover, we do not know how Black low-income and lower middle-class students make meaning of their class backgrounds. They may draw meaning in similar ways because they both come from economically vulnerable positions. This dissertation fills this gap by analyzing how Black students in each of these class groups make meaning of their economic background.

Although Black students' class backgrounds ranged along a class continuum, I found that the Black lower middle-class shares experiences that are more similar to that of Black students from low-income backgrounds. In contrast, Black students from the solidly middle-class come from more secure economic background thus marking their experiences as different from that of their lower middle-class and low-income Black peers. I argue that the financial instability experienced by lower middle-class and low-income Black students demonstrates the fluidity of class boundaries for those at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. These fluid class boundaries work to create similarities in experience for these students and shape more distinctive boundaries between them and their Black solidly middle-class peers. These class boundaries also shape particular challenges at the university for Black low-income and lower middle-class students that may ultimately affect their retention.

In the following sections, I explain these three class groupings in further detail, drawing on interview data to demonstrate what each class background looks like in the lives of students. Next, I show how this class fluidity is exemplified in the lives of students through mechanisms of upward and downward mobility. Then, I examine how class influences how Black students experience financial challenges, make meaning of their background and perceive their Black peers.

Class Backgrounds

The relative privilege of the solidly middle-class is exemplified in their narratives of family life. Jordan, a Black student from a solidly middle-class background grew up with a father as a hospital administrator while his mother stayed at home to care for him and his three siblings. When I asked him how his family spent time together while he was growing up, he responded:

We did family vacation every couple of years. Then, one time we went to Disney World...We went on a cruise...We always went out to dinner a lot or to movies – family time.

Jordan's father made enough income to financially provide for the family while his mother had the option of staying at home to raise her children that is a rarity in most homes where both parents often have to work to support the family. Moreover, Jordan's parents had excess resources that they could use to partake in vacations and going out to dinner and trips to the movies.

In contrast, Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds came from families that lacked excess income and were often "barely making ends meet." David's father is a bus driver and his mother worked her way up from a package handler to a desk job at UPS. He describes his family's economic situation this way:

They [parents] both [had] blue collar jobs. I mean, we had it better than most, but we still had to do without common amenities and things like that, that insulation in your house or updating your windows and things like that...My parents are kind of old fashioned. They don't have a garbage disposal or anything like that. Pretty much everything on the house is the same because of money.

In this situation, David's family had just enough money to pay their bills and lacked the excess money to make necessary repairs on their home. He acknowledges that he has "had it better than most" but that growing up, he lived in a household where his parents really had to budget their money. David's narrative exemplifies the typical background of Black students from lower

middle-class backgrounds: parents were just able to meet the bills every month with little money left over.

This economic struggle is exacerbated further when we examine the situation of Black students from low-income backgrounds. These students came from families that faced severe economic hardship and struggle. Edon describes his life growing up this way:

I stayed in the Projects. We lived, for the most part – because my mother was in school – we lived paycheck to paycheck. And we had supplemental income coming through from the county. We bounced around a whole lot from place to place...There were a lot of times...towards the end of the month, when things got really, really tight, I would just go stay with my aunt. She had boyfriends who would sell drugs so they would always have food in her house. So I would just go stay over there for a little bit of time.

Edon's family lacked a stable income and struggled to pay for even basic necessities such as rent and food. Public assistance was still not enough to keep the family afloat financially and they wound up moving quite often throughout Edon's childhood. At times, Edon found himself at his aunt's house; although it was a potentially dangerous environment given her association with drug dealers, Edon still sought this place as a somewhat stable refuge where there would be enough food for him to eat. Like Edon, Black students from low-income backgrounds often came from financial situations that were extremely difficult for their families to overcome. Many students went without food, moved around often (and in some cases, were homeless) and they often resided in underserved neighborhoods where violence was common.

Class Mobility and Fluidity

As I conducted this study, I quickly learned that class was not an easy thing to define nor was it easy to develop class categories and group the students accordingly. I found that the demographic information that students reported was often inconsistent with what was reported in the interviews. Many of the Black students I interviewed had moved from one class group to

another over time. Most of the students had experienced upward mobility over time, meaning that their parents had moved to a higher and more secure class status. Some of the reasons for this upward mobility included at least one parent obtaining a higher paying job, marrying someone and as a result raising the household income or attaining further education that led to access to better paying employment. When families achieved upward mobility, they reached a more economically secure status that translated into both material and non-material benefits for everyone in the family.

Upward Mobility via Education

One route to upward mobility was through education. Many of the students' parents had received an advanced degree (Associate's or Bachelor's degree, in a few cases a graduate/professional degree) during the respondent's childhood that allowed them the opportunity to gain income and acquire more resources. Carlos describes his family's passage to upward mobility via education this way:

We were poor. I had holes in my shoes going to school... We couldn't really get the name brand stuff that all the other kids wear. We'd have to shop from the discount magazine, or something that came in the newspaper, we'd have to go get those... My dad wasn't bringing in money [because he was in law school]... I remember, growing up, he would always just be in the little storage room, in the back house, just trying to study. He took the Bar, three or four times. [After he passed the Bar], he started being able to provide... We were able to get better things.

For a period of time, Carlos's family struggled to survive on his mother's income while his father was in law school. The family kept a tight budget that meant that Carlos and his siblings could not always get the things they needed (such as new shoes to replace a worn pair) or wanted. However, once his father became a lawyer, he brought in more income and they were able to better afford household necessities as well as a few luxuries.

Upward Mobility via Marriage

Marriage also led to upward mobility for several Black students in this study. In these cases, students came from single parent households; mostly households with single mothers who often get paid less than men. Their mothers had difficulty affording all of their household costs and raising children. However, when their mothers married a new partner, the household income rose and these students found themselves occupying a more stable class status.

I would say my family was middle class, maybe upper middle class, but that was after my stepdad. When it was just me and my mom and my brother like...I'm really hesitant to say lower class, but we definitely didn't have as much stuff growing up. Like I said, McDonald's was our big thing and, yeah, we didn't really have that much money growing up... I never want to have to go back to that. I don't want to have to worry about whether or not I'm going to have money to buy my kids food or send them to school. That's just something that I really don't want to go back to, and so because I have lived through that, ...I do push myself more.

Dana's father passed away when she was young and for awhile, her mother was single trying to raise both Dana and her brother on her own. They did not have a lot of money growing up. When her mother married her stepfather, he provided additional income that allowed them the opportunity to live in a home in a wealthy suburban community. As a result, Dana attended a top high school in the area, getting the opportunity to receive an excellent education and participate in numerous extracurricular activities. Dana exhibits an appreciation for the privilege that she has now and wants to guard against having downward mobility: going back to an economically unstable situation.

Upward Mobility via Employment

Several of the students experienced upward mobility through their parents attaining higher paying employment. These employment positions were also more stable moving from service sector jobs to skilled/semi-skilled jobs. Shanice describes her father's employment trajectory from a less stable occupation to a more secure one:

He became a probation officer later. First, he used to work at a boot camp for boys... but before that, he worked at a painting company, a Sherwin-Williams in L.A. And it got burned down in the Rodney King riots...and after he overcame that, then he became a probation officer later and then we moved.

Shanice's father worked in retail jobs in the early part of her childhood. He did not earn enough income to provide for Shanice's mom and her many brothers and sisters and throughout the interview, Shanice spoke about the hardships that they had to endure growing up. They lived in an urban area that was not entirely safe. They tried to earn extra money in different ways. For example, Shanice recalls the entire family waking up early in the morning on the weekends to rummage through trash bins in the local park, looking for bottles that they could recycle for money. Shanice and her siblings would also help her father do yardwork in other people's homes in exchange for money as well. When her father became a probation officer, their financial situation dramatically changed. Her father earned more money and subsequently was able to move them to a safer, suburban neighborhood. Although Shanice maintains that her large family still had to live frugally, they were able to acquire a more economically secure status that benefited the entire family not only financially but also along other dimensions including home ownership, access to a safer neighborhood and better schools.

Downward Mobility

Whereas most of the families in the study had acquired upward mobility over time, there were some families who had experienced downward mobility, that is, they moved from a financially stable status to a less secure one. This happened due to some great upheaval within the family that affected access to a stable income. Three sources of this upheaval were typically (1) death of a parent, (2) divorce between parents or (3) job loss. When any of these situations occurred, families struggled to make ends-meet and often had to go without necessities or comforts that they were used to having. They had to adjust to living in a different manner than

what they were accustomed to. Sometimes, this downward mobility led to severe economic hardship for families.

Downward Mobility via Death of a Parent

Loss of a parent affected families both emotionally and financially. Families were often unable to sustain their previous income and students had to adjust to living a completely different life than what they were used to. Families had to live much more frugally and lacked the money to afford even basic necessities at times. Some students talked about being on public assistance for awhile. In some cases, families could not stay intact and students were forced to move in with other relatives in neighborhoods that were not very safe. Malik describes his experience after his mother passed away and he had to move in with an aunt,

So that transition from where I was, having a house and cable and a car, that was normative life for me. Moving to L.A. and then living in a small apartment, I didn't have my own room, there was no car, there was no cable, there was no air conditioning...and the community was completely different, it was just black and Latino in the community. There were gangs and drugs and there's stuff that I'm not used to. So then that neighborhood was way different.

Malik and his siblings transitioned from having a middle-class status to a low-income one. They had previously lived in a predominantly White middle-class community. The family was economically stable living in a home with many of the comforts of a middle-class existence. When his mother died and his father was no longer able to care for him, Malik and his siblings had to move to a new city, Los Angeles, with different demographic populations, specifically Blacks and Latinos. They had to adjust to a new city with different demographic populations. The neighborhood itself was dangerous and lacked resources. Their living conditions were more challenging and there was not enough money to sustain the household. In fact, Malik and his siblings lived in public housing and the family received public assistance. This transition was

very hard for Malik and his siblings to deal with. They had to learn to adjust to an entirely new way of life, without things they needed and without their mother.

Downward Mobility via Divorce

Another way that economic status shifted is when there was divorce in the family. When students' parents got divorced, household income severely decreased. Students were living in households with one income (usually that of their mother) that often did not cover bills and other expenses. In order to manage the household, their families had to rely on public assistance for support. Students spoke about living in small apartments with their mothers and siblings without access to necessities and small comforts. When Michelle's mother divorced her stepfather, she was sent to live out of state with relatives. Prior to divorce, Michelle's mother earned a stable income as a nurse. When Michelle returned to live with her mother again, her mother was no longer working as a nurse and their living situation had drastically changed.

[My mother] had a nursing certification, and then she stopped working as a nurse, and I don't know why... When I had left California [due to divorce], she was still a nurse, and when I came back she wasn't a nurse any more... We were making good money when she was a nurse... After that, she just didn't work any more. She started taking government money and funding. We had support from the government, yeah... [We were living in] a studio apartment, we had no furniture, we didn't have cable, so I was just sitting in a room, a box room.

Her mother's divorce appeared to cause some instability within Michelle's family. Her mother was not able to care for her and she was sent out of state to live with relatives for several years. When she returned, Michelle's mother was no longer working at all and was taking public assistance to sustain the household. At the time of the interview, Michelle's mother had obtained a college degree the year prior but was still not working and on public assistance. Michelle alludes to this as being a choice rather than her mother's inability to find a job. Divorce played a

role in creating family upheaval. Michelle was particularly affected by these changes through having to live with relatives for a period of time and then returning to a household with little money and lacking the basic necessities that were once there. As a result, Michelle began working at a young age and spending time outside of her home to avoid dealing with a challenging living situation.

Downward Mobility via Job Loss

Unemployment of one or both parents often led to downward mobility as well. Students reported that job loss had devastating effects on their families pushing them into an economically unstable position. Families had difficulty paying bills and covering household expenses. Living on a much tighter budget became a reality for many students after job loss occurred in the family. Students and their families had to go without some of the things they needed or find alternate ways of gaining these necessities. Monica describes the creative way her parents accessed resources after they lost their business:

And so we were standing in Albertsons and my mom – we had just been scrounging for change. And we literally had to stand to the side and roll \$10.00 in pennies. And it was just like I wasn't embarrassed, but I was sad because I know how hard my parents have worked in their lifetime. So just that experience alone, I knew things weren't really going to get better. And a lot of the clothes I received...would be from family.

Monica's family had to develop ways to getting the things that they needed including rolling loose change and wearing hand-me-down clothes. In the interview, Monica describes the situation to this adjustment as challenging. She knew that her parents did not have the money that they used to have and everyone had to get used to dealing with financial strain. However, she is most affected emotionally by what job loss did to her family: knowing that her parents had

worked so hard all of their lives and lost nearly everything. The scope of this loss signaled to Monica that her family would be dealing with financial hardship for years to come. Monica's story reveals the financial and emotional toll that job loss and subsequently downward mobility, can have on students and their families. Given our nation's recession today, many students are likely to share a similar narrative.

Influence of Class on Educational Experiences

In an earlier section, I provided an overview of the three class groups in this study: low-income, lower middle-class and solidly middle-class. Solidly middle-class Black students have a substantial amount of privilege relative to the groups while lower middle-class Black students came from families who were "barely making ends-meet" and low-income Black students came from economically dire circumstances. It is important to understand these class backgrounds because they have implications for Black students' pursuit of education today. Class background can influence the types of experiences that Black students have at the university. More specifically, class can affect the ways Black students experience financial concerns and challenges. Students have differential access to resources based on their class status and this can affect the level of financial difficulty that they encounter. Moreover, it can also influence the ways students making meaning of their class background and how they perceive their Black peers. In the following sections, I will discuss how class influences Black student's financial challenges, meaning-making and perceptions of their Black peers at the university.

Low-income: Family Responsibility and Financial Independence

One of the issues that affected Black students from low-income backgrounds was that many were responsible for caring for family members. Nearly half of the sample of low-income students had families themselves (e.g. partners/children) and others had both immediate and

extended family that they were responsible for financially and otherwise. Most of the students drew upon financial aid, scholarships and their own employment to cover the costs of tuition, housing and living expenses. In addition, they were also using a portion of this money to provide financially for their families. Many students keenly felt this sense of responsibility quite strongly and pursued employment and scholarship opportunities that would provide them with the necessary income to give to their families. Malik discusses how he uses the money from his job:

“When I started UCLA, I didn’t need the job to support myself. I had enough financial aid and scholarships to cover tuition and housing. But my aunt was terminated from her job...So most of my money...has been going towards paying half of the rent...giving her money for her car note...So really just to support them [family] until she gets back on her feet...”

Malik’s main motivation for employment was to provide financial assistance for his family. Even though his financial aid and scholarships cover his college expenses, Malik felt compelled to take on a job in order to support them. Without his financial assistance, Malik’s family could have faced very dire economic circumstances. In addition to employment, many students also drew on other forms of financial support to give to their families. Students utilized a variety of sources including internships, scholarships and financial aid in order to provide for their families. Several students had partners and children who were depending on them as well. Overall, most Black students from low-income backgrounds had families who faced severe economic hardship and lacked access to resources that could help them. Or if their families had utilized resources such as public assistance, for example, it often was not enough to live on. Students provided extra income that was necessary for family survival.

However, these commitments present challenges to students in terms of time and energy (that takes them away from their academic work) as well as budgeting their income to fulfill all of these obligations. In the interviews, students mentioned that they spent a significant amount of

time at work and then had to make sure that they budgeted their income and financial aid to support themselves and their families. As these students are responsible for themselves and their families, they are financially independent. Unlike Black students from more privileged backgrounds, these students have no financial assistance from family or friends to help them pay their college expenses. They are essentially “on their own,” making their way through college with the help of financial aid and employment while aiding their family along the way.

Lower Middle-Class: Family Responsibility and Financial Struggle

Similar to Black students from low-income backgrounds, several Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds also had to work in order to meet their responsibilities. One of these responsibilities was caring for their families. These students provided their families with various forms of support, including financial resources. Families were barely making ends-meet and sometimes relied on students to cover necessary bills and expenses. The tenuous nature of a lower middle-class status means that students in this group come from families who tend to lack financial stability. Therefore, they have to offer financial support to their families in order for them to make ends-meet. In some cases, students were called upon to help their families at particularly critical times.

What do you use the money from your job for? “For expenses, like housing. My financial aid never covers all of my housing...I am trying to help out. Especially after my dad’s surgery because he doesn’t have insurance so he is paying for his surgery.

-Shannon

In Shannon’s case, she is trying to help her father financially as he recovers from his surgery. He lacks health insurance and the responsibility is left up to Shannon to provide financial support. In addition, she is also paying for her housing so she is trying to financially support herself as a student as well as provide for her family. Just like their Black peers from low-income

backgrounds, these lower middle-class students have to balance both their family and academic responsibilities. Achieving this balance can be quite difficult given the demands of college course work and the time, energy and financial support that students have to give their families.

Even though student's responsibility to family ranged in frequency and specificity, students in these situations all felt compelled to take on these responsibilities in addition to their schoolwork, employment and other activities. They recognized that their families were in tenuous economic situations and they wanted to help them. These are responsibilities that students from more privileged backgrounds do not have to deal with. It is important to note that some lower middle-class students had to economically provide for their families in comparison to most low-income students having to do so. This is not surprising given the fluidity of class; some students in the lower middle-class have families that are in more financially precarious situations than others. However, family responsibility was not found among Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds. This was an issue that appeared to be particularly salient for Black low-income and lower middle-class students because their families were in more economically unstable situations. In this way, Black students from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds share similar financial challenges in having to financially support their families.

Financial Struggle

Another responsibility that Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds faced was having to work to pay for their college expenses. They faced situations where they had trouble affording their college expenses, particularly when it came to housing. Many of the students across class groups found housing at UCLA to be very expensive. Among some Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds, housing became the most difficult expense to

afford. These students were often confronted with their inability to pay for housing and they had to figure out different ways to afford these expenses, otherwise they would face eviction. In order to afford university housing, many of these students had to take on extra employment or seek outside scholarships.

“The second job, it was the UCLA Call Center...UCLA housing is so expensive, so my paycheck went straight to housing and there was no way I was going to be able to pay my housing if I didn’t get a second job”

-Leticia

Leticia had to take on an extra job just to pay for her housing. Without paying for her housing, Leticia’s enrollment as a student at UCLA would have been in jeopardy. Leticia’s family does not live in Los Angeles so she did not have the option of living with them and commuting to school as some other students do. Leticia is left with no other option but to pursue extra employment that takes time away from her academic responsibilities. In contrast to Black students from more privileged backgrounds, Leticia is confronted with an economic situation that she must handle on her own. In the interview, Leticia mentioned that her mother did help her pay for school with a parent loan. However, it is unclear how much money Leticia’s mother could contribute to her education and clearly it was not enough to pay for housing.

As a Black student from a lower middle-class background, Leticia has a level of privilege over those from low-income backgrounds in that she receives some financial support from her family. However, she does not receive enough financial support to meet all of her expenses (as those students from more privileged backgrounds do) and must take on extra employment in order to do so. Moreover, as Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds, Leticia and Shannon (mentioned above) do not receive enough financial aid to cover their expenses. Their families make incomes that do not qualify them for the financial support that they need so they

have to work to pay these expenses. Most of the Black students from low-income backgrounds that I interviewed received enough financial aid and scholarships to cover all of their college expenses. As a result, low-income students worked but used their money mostly to provide for their families. For lower middle-class Black students, employment was used in two ways: to support family and to pay their college expenses.

Solidly Middle-Class: Financial Concerns but More Secure

Within the solidly middle-class group, there were students who expressed concern over paying for tuition, housing and living expenses. As these students were often paying for school with a combination of financial aid, parent's support and scholarships, they spoke mainly about having to budget their money in order to pay all of their bills. Some students addressed the issue of rising college costs and budget cuts in light of both a state and national economic crisis that could affect how they will pay for their education. Bianca explains the financial concerns that she has,

How do you manage your college expenses? "It's financial aids, loans, and scholarships, it's a mixture of all those, and it's just getting increasingly more difficult because seeing how they're cutting my mom's pay...I'm saving, saving, saving everything. I have loans to pay back but with the budget cuts I think I'm going to have to take out more, so it's going to be an issue, but hopefully I can get somewhere and I can pay that..."

Bianca worries about accruing more debt and having to pay it back after graduation. Her financial aid and her mother's salary are being cut forcing her to take out more loans to pay for her education. She is trying to budget her money now so that she can afford all of her college expenses. After graduation, she hopes to obtain a job that will allow her the opportunity to pay off her loans, although given our economic recession, this will be certainly more difficult. Even though Bianca comes from a more economically stable background than other students, she still carries with her serious financial concerns. However, Bianca's economic status affords her some

level of protection; she worries about these issues but ultimately can draw on her resources to deal with financial changes that come her way. She also does not face immediate financial challenges in the present as her low-income and lower middle-class students do. Black students in less privileged class groups, particularly those from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds, face direct financial obstacles that can keep them from pursuing their education. Moreover, they have fewer resources to work with to meet these challenges head on. Black students from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds face similar financial challenges that are different from that of solidly middle-class Black students.

Whereas Black students from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds needed to provide financial assistance to their families, several students from the solidly middle-class actually sought financial support from their families to pay for their college expenses. Many of the students spoke about the financial contribution that their parents made towards their college education. This contribution ranged from a small amount of money to pay for bills to rent to completely paying all educational expenses. The range of support is consistent with the income level of parents; students whose parents made more money were able to cover more of their expenses than those who made less. This family support allowed the students the freedom to not have to worry as much about paying their tuition and housing. Katrina comes from a family that is fairly well off and her parents are able to pay for her education. She has an on-campus job but she uses the money for something much different than her Black peers who hail from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds.

What do you use the money from your job for? [To] pay for my sorority. And I think I have to work more on saving it because mom's paying for all my college right now, and that's a lot of money. I want to save and help out. And then – I have to stop buying clothes every weekend first.

As a student at the higher end of the solidly middle-class spectrum, Katrina's mother is able to take care of her educational expenses. She does not have to worry about her tuition and housing bills; she has the freedom to devote herself completely to her schoolwork and extracurricular activities on campus. She works a job on campus but she uses the money on extracurricular activities such as her sorority or on material goods such as clothes. While Katrina recognizes the financial sacrifices that her mother has made and even wants to help out, she jokes about her clothes-spending habit. Her ability to be somewhat flip about money demonstrates her considerable privilege relative to Black students from other class groups. Katrina can afford to joke about her privilege and spend money on the things that she would like; not necessarily the things that she needs. For Black students from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds, money from jobs is spent on necessities: financially supporting family members and paying college expenses.

Class Meaning-Making

Another salient issue that arose during the interviews was how Black students made sense of their class background. Black students' thoughts and perception of their own class status sheds light on what being from a solidly middle, lower middle or low-income background means to them. It also provides insight as to how these students may interact and relate to their peers and what they envision their future to be like after they graduate. As students at UCLA, one of the top public research universities in the nation, they all occupy a privileged position relative to many of their peers, both Black and non-Black. As college students, many of them stand at the cusp of social mobility but class background is not forgotten. All of the students exhibited a keen awareness of their class background while they were growing up and could recall ways in which they were privileged, barely surviving or lacking basic necessities. Moreover, the ways that

Black students made meaning of class varied by their background. For example, Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds thought about their class background in very different ways than their peers from low-income backgrounds. While there was variation in how students perceived class impacting their lives, nearly all of the students believed that class mattered and were able to provide highly nuanced and complex ways of conceptualizing their own background.

Meaning of Low-income: Character-building and Empowered to take Action

In addition to sorting Black students into different class groups based on a variety of demographic indicators, I asked them to self-define their economic background. Most of the students from low-income backgrounds identified as some designation of poor, low-income or lower class with little variation. Many of the students talked about lacking basic necessities such as food, living in unstable households (e.g. overdue bills, moving around often), living in neighborhoods plagued by violence and being on public assistance for a period of time. My placing of these students in the low-income category was consistent with the ways that these students thought of their own class background.

When I asked Black students from low-income backgrounds what their class status meant to them, many of the students spoke about what they learned from their class background. Students framed their class background as a learning experience. They felt that their class background imparted within them particular morals and values that shaped their personality. It also affected how they interacted with other people. Ricky explains how his economic background plays a role in the way he treats staff members on campus,

As I grew up in the lower class, being around UCLA lets me know that I appreciate things way more than other people do...Even the Black people that aren't from the lower class...they just don't appreciate things, like in the dining hall and different places on campus where they serve you food, I speak to everybody. "How are you doing?" to the

person that's serving you and things like that. And they stand there all day. And that's all they want is a "Hi. How are you doing?" Just talk. People walk and they get their food and they're rude. They don't say hi. They don't say thank you. This person is working hard all day serving you food. Appreciate that. I just don't think they appreciate the smaller things. And I just appreciate all of that. Because I understand...I know people personally that work and serve people so it's hard to not speak and hard to disrespect them.

Coming from a low-income background, Ricky believes that he has developed an appreciation for the things he has in his life. In particular, Ricky appreciates others who are providing him with the services that he needs. He makes a conscious decision to speak to service workers on campus as a way of acknowledging their presence and showing respect. Ricky also views his speaking to service workers as a way of signaling his appreciation for their work. Moreover, when Ricky speaks to service workers on campus, he pays homage to the people he knows back home who “serve people.”

However, Ricky finds that this particular value of appreciation is lacking in many of his Black peers on campus who come from more privileged economic backgrounds. He is critical of other students who disrespect service workers and look down upon them. He draws a connection between economic background and particular values and actions. He asserts that his experience growing up in economic struggle has given him the compassion and understanding to interact with others who also share similar backgrounds. In contrast, he sees other students, particularly other Black students from more privileged backgrounds, as taking the resources that are made available to them for granted. Like Ricky, many Black students from low-income backgrounds viewed their class status as a way that they learned particular morals and values such as appreciation, hard work and motivation that other students from more privileged backgrounds lacked. Class background was framed as an experience that helped to build one's character for the better.

Building upon the idea of class as character building, many Black students from low-income backgrounds spoke of their economic status as being a catalyst for them to take action. Many students felt compelled to change their economic status and work towards creating a more stable future for themselves and their families. Students talked about not wanting to return to the financial struggles and hardships that they had experienced growing up. They felt empowered to become change agents for themselves, their families and their communities. Janet discusses how being from a low-income background has affected her:

I think struggling has made me a stronger person...It really has been the driving mechanism for me. I would say, I was going to do this because I don't want to be like that. I don't want my kids to go through homelessness and a lot of the stuff I went through.

Janet credits her economic background and more specifically the fact that she struggled growing up, as a motivating factor for her pursuing goals that will provide her with social mobility. Janet's economic background appears to be at the forefront of her consciousness; she wants to achieve financial stability so she does not have to go back to struggling. This was a common theme among many Black students from low-income backgrounds: in an effort to avoid going back to the economic struggle that they had experienced, students pursued every opportunity that would help move them forward.

Although she is young and not yet a mother, Janet references the future children that she plans to have stating that her desire for economic stability is also because she does not want them to go through the same things that she has. Many Black students from low-income backgrounds spoke of the future and wanting to make things better for their own children. There was a sense of urgency among the students as many of their families still struggled economically and given that they were in college, students felt well positioned to help. Given that students were also

financially independent, they sought to acquire stable employment or graduate/professional degrees so that they could provide for themselves as well.

Lower middle-class: Struggle that builds Character

Most Black students that were grouped into the lower middle-class category self-identified as lower middle-class themselves. Their own self-definitions were consistent with my own class sortings in the study. However, several students identified as working class or low-income. Although demographic and interview data led to their being grouped into the lower middle-class category, students spoke about their families struggling economically, lacking excess resources and living paycheck to paycheck. These experiences may have contributed to their understanding of their class position as either working class or low-income. Moreover, the line between working class, lower middle-class and low-income is rather fluid and not easily distinguishable. Several students moved from low-income to lower middle-class backgrounds and still strongly identified with being from a low-income background. The uses of lower middle, low-income and working class in their self-definitions highlight the complex economic biographies of many Black students in this “in-between” group. They lie in a tenuous economic position, just above poverty.

Because of their financially unstable status, many Black lower middle-class students made meaning of their background through drawing on common narratives that their low-income peers expressed. For example, many students spoke about encountering economic hardship growing up that shaped their character. Moreover, students credited these experiences with empowering them to want to take action to make things better for their families. These themes of character building and empowerment highlight the shared experiences of many lower middle and

low-income students. Brandon, a student-athlete, discusses what his economic background means to him,

I came from nothing so I got to leave with something. I always say that when I got to work out or something. Growing up was struggling. I always thought I had to have a better life – better for my parents and my sisters. I don't want my kids living like that, growing up like that. But it taught us a lot – being strong. And going without sometimes makes you stronger. It's not fun but it brought us closer. We've been through everything together so it kept us closer as a family.

In this excerpt, Brandon talks about the financial hardships that his family had to endure when he was growing up. He also feels that these experiences have built his own personal character and influenced the very foundation of his family: through making him stronger and bringing his family closer together. Brandon is determined to work towards a better future for himself and for his family. Similar to Janet, a Black student from a low-income background quoted earlier, he also references future children as a concern, wanting to provide them with the resources and stability that he did not always have access to growing up. Like many of his lower middle-class peers, Brandon's family experienced periods of financially "good" times and "hard times." The financial challenges that Brandon has experienced clearly resonate with him; they have shaped who he is and what he plans to achieve in the future.

While many Black students from the lower middle-class drew meaning from their background in a similar way to that of low-income students, they also recognized the relative privilege of their background compared to those students. For example, students spoke about having just enough growing up but not excess. Although having "just enough" meant that they fared better than their low-income peers, these students still encountered numerous economic challenges growing up. Shannon shares how her family managed their expenses on her single mother's salary:

We were never starving or things like that. She [mother] made sure that there was always food in the house. We had to make cuts just in the materials. We didn't run water when we didn't need it- we didn't take excessively long showers or have the heat on in the winter all the time, "You know, put a sweater on." But buying new clothes and a new pair of shoes, I didn't have the nice clothes. In middle school to get coats we had to go to Good Will. My aunt would give me clothes and things like that from my cousins because they didn't fit [them] anymore.

Shannon's narrative demonstrates some of the sacrifices her family had to make in order to cut costs, particularly on the utility bills. She also speaks about receiving hand-me down clothes from relatives and from Good Will in order to defray expenses as well. In this case, Shannon highlights what it means to be lower middle-class: having just enough money for the bare necessities such as food and shelter and needing to make sacrifices on the rest. In addition, some students (including Shannon) were completely financially responsible for themselves growing up beyond the basic necessities. These students were expected to come up with the money themselves for extracurricular activities, outings and material goods. Other students such as David who was referenced earlier in the chapter, spoke of their families having to make sacrifices in terms of making much needed household repairs. There simply was not any excess money for these types of expenses.

Among the lower middle-class, there was a range of responses from some students having what they needed and wanted, to others having limits placed upon them to get what they wanted (e.g. new clothes) to students who were more financially responsible for themselves and having to make sacrifices to defray expenses. However, the lower middle-class narratives were striking in that students provided detailed accounts of struggle and self-sacrifice. Many Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds were able to articulate rather vividly what only having "enough" meant to them and how it affected their daily life. Both low-income and lower

middle-class Black students draw meaning in similar ways from their backgrounds: through accounts of economic hardship and sacrifice.

Solidly middle-class: Privilege without excess

My sorting of these students into the solidly middle-class group were consistent with their own self-definitions of their class background. That is, most of the solidly middle-class students defined their own class status as middle class with a small minority of students who saw themselves as upper middle-class. These students viewed their solidly middle-class status as a place of privilege. Students spoke about various forms of privilege including having access to good schools, living in safe neighborhoods and not having to worry about paying for school. Similar to some of their low-income peers, they compared their own financial situation to that of their Black peers and felt that they were privileged because they had access to more resources. Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds also tended to see themselves as “fortunate” because they recognized that they had privileges that other students did not. Some students spoke about their background as providing them with particular values and exposure to different possibilities. Bianca discusses what she feels her solidly middle-class background provides her,

It means that I have the opportunity financially to do certain things that maybe other kids couldn't do. I have an opportunity to live in a somewhat good neighborhood...go to a good school...and just have the opportunity to be around individuals who knew the value of a dollar, who knew the value of education. They just always knew those things, and so they instilled that in me. So from a middle class background, you associate with middle class things, whatever they might be, whether it's the church that you go to, you have a lot of people with degrees, with PhDs, not just degrees. You just have that and if you're immersed in it, you want to be like that and so being in a middle class black neighborhood or class, you have...your perceptions of life are a little bit different. You know that there's much more out there than just... slanging stuff on the street or failing out of your classes because you're not going to get ahead anywhere...

Bianca's solidly middle-class background provides her with resources such as good schools and safe neighborhoods. However, she also talks about being exposed to other middle-class people who valued money and education and they imparted these values to her. In this statement, Bianca implies that the middle-class holds particular values that others from less privileged backgrounds do not. This ignores the structural factors that impact low-income communities such as under-funded resources and inferior schools.

Bianca also points to her middle-class background as exposing her to a realm of possibilities for her education and future career. This exposure is important because it not only expands opportunities for young adults like Bianca but it also pushes the boundaries of Blackness. For example, through encountering Black people with PhD's, Bianca learns that people who look like her can achieve this degree making it a more tangible reality for her. Her middle-class background allows Bianca access to these "role models" and to the resources that can help her pursue her educational and career objectives.

Although most Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds considered themselves to be privileged relative to other groups, many of them described their background as having enough but not excess. Students said that they had what they needed for the most part but they did not necessarily receive a lot of extra material things. In a few cases, students came from large families or had extended family that lived with them for a period of time, so resources had to be distributed among several people. This did not allow for much leftover money to acquire extra possessions. Most students described their background as being financially "comfortable." However, these narratives differed from that of their lower middle-class Black peers because these students rarely had to make tough financial sacrifices. Still, some students were

consciously aware that others had more resources available to them. Leanna describes her experience,

Because I felt like looking back, I was always comfortable. I wasn't aware that I had maybe less things than other people. And I remember in elementary school we all sat around the teacher and like what did you get for Christmas, and I told her, oh, I got this doll house, and everybody was kind of oh, I got this, and this, and this, all these crazy gifts. But I remember thinking I was fine with that. Like thinking that I don't need all these things. And I don't know how they [grandparents] did it, but they just taught that – or they just kind of like embedded that in me; I don't need all these things.

In this excerpt, Leanna describes her “comfortable” middle-class existence; she received what she needed and some things that she wanted but they were by no means in excess. In fact, she references some of the more expensive Christmas presents that other students received as compared to her own as a way of demonstrating where her family fell on the economic scale in her community. Leanna also asserts that her grandparents (who raised her), instilled in her a sense of gratitude and humility. She felt like she did not need or expect to receive a lot but was happy with what her grandparents were able to provide her. In her interview, Leanna also describes having to help her grandparents with household work and chores. This expectation was particularly necessary given that Leanna grew up in a rural area where everyone had to do their part both inside and outside the house in order to ensure that the household ran smoothly. Like Leanna, many Black students from the solidly middle-class described their background as being in the middle- as not low-income but not rich.

Moreover, many students spoke of coming from humble backgrounds in the sense that they recognized how hard their parents worked to provide for them and they in turn, did not ask for or demand a lot of material things. Students also spoke about varying periods of class fluctuation where their families had more or fewer financial resources throughout their childhood. Students often saw their background as having enough to get by in life and being

relatively “comfortable.” However, the idea of being “comfortable” stands in sharp contrast to those from lower middle-class backgrounds who had “just enough.” Having enough but not excess to them meant that they had only the bare necessities and nothing more. The meaning of “comfortable” that Black students from the solidly middle-class ascribed to their class background was very different from the meanings of struggle and hardship that Black students from the lower middle class and low-income groups ascribed to their background.

The exception to this theme of “enough but not excess” would be a small population of students in the sample that came from the higher end of the solidly middle-class scale. These students came from wealthier neighborhoods and their parents were often paying for their college education. As they were growing up, these students were often exposed to a range of more expensive extracurricular activities and vacations. Solidly middle-class students in this category had excess material and financial resources compared to their same-class peers.

Class Perceptions

Class also influenced the ways that Black students perceived one another on campus. Black student perceptions of the class backgrounds of their Black peers were often formed through interactions on campus. When Black students from different class backgrounds would interact with one another, they would recognize class boundaries between themselves and other students. These boundaries were often framed around either having privilege or lacking privilege. In these interactions, students developed perceptions of other Black students based on notions of privilege and difference. These perceptions of difference led to some tension among Black students of different class backgrounds, most notably between the solidly middle-class and those from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds.

However, this tension rarely extended into conflict. Many of the students from the lower middle and low-income groups said that they regularly engaged with other Black students who came from similar class backgrounds as them. This may be due to the fact that UCLA is a public university, attracting many Black students from the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. If this study was conducted at a private university that tends to attract more privileged students, it is possible that there would be more conflict among Black students from different class backgrounds. Nevertheless, when Black students from different class backgrounds interacted at UCLA, issues of privilege arose and tension was present in many of these encounters.

Low-income: Encountering Privilege

For many Black students from low-income backgrounds, arriving at UCLA was one of the few times they met other Blacks from more privileged backgrounds and had sustained interactions with over time. Within these interactions, Black students from low-income backgrounds recognized the economic privilege of their Black peers. This economic privilege was signaled to students through the behavior and attitudes of the solidly middle-class. D.J. recounts his interactions with Black students from more privileged backgrounds,

“Some don’t even go to class sometimes. Then, why are you spending the money on it? And when we go out to lunch, they can pay for it and do all that other stuff...and then obviously I say, “I’m paying for UCLA.” They’ll be like, “Oh, my dad is a doctor,” or “My mom and dad are lawyers.” And they have the mentality...You have everything... And it’s good because you don’t have to worry about whether your parents are going to have enough money to pay the bills. That’s something I have to worry about. It’s like trying to get them to realize- You’ve got a lot of good things going for you, so run with it, and do really well because you can.”

D.J. details a few different ways that privilege manifests itself at the university. He recognizes that these Black students are more privileged than he is because they have spending money that

they use to pay for meals and other activities on campus. Their parents' occupation in professional jobs is also a sign of privilege and a far cry from D.J.'s own parents who are both disabled and unemployed. D.J. also is responsible for financially supporting his family and figuring out how to pay his way through college. In contrast, Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds do not have to worry about these issues.

D.J. also references another marker of a higher financial status: "the mentality." This was a theme that arose in several interviews where students referenced more affluent Black students having particular attitudes. These attitudes ranged from "snobby and stuck-up" to a laissez-faire attitude with their academics. D.J. seems to interpret these students' not attending class as them taking their education for granted. He can not fathom why more affluent Black students would spend the money on an education that they are not taking full advantage of because he is paying for college and values it highly as a result. However, these students' parents may be funding their education so they might view money and their position within UCLA differently. D.J. also feels that it is precisely because these students are privileged that they should appreciate their opportunities and make use of them. Through experiences, behavior and attitudes, D.J. perceives clear differences between himself, a Black student from a low-income background, and his Black peers from solidly middle-class backgrounds.

Lower middle-class: Seeing the "Disconnect"

Although many Black students from the lower middle-class, situated their background as somewhere between economic hardship and privilege, they tended to strongly identify with experiences of economic struggle. If we think of class as a continuum, lower middle-class students would be in the middle but closer to low-income students than their solidly middle-class

peers. Many Black students from the lower middle-class encountered economic struggle at some point in their lives and their families often lack financial stability. Their experiences are more closely aligned with that of low-income Black students. When Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds encountered their more privileged peers, they often felt disconnected from them claiming that those students did not understand their experiences. They were able to recognize the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) differences between themselves and these students. Jennifer discusses her interactions with Black students from more privileged backgrounds,

“At times, you can see the disconnect – they didn’t grow up where you grew up. You could tell that they were a little bit more spoiled. “Look at that.” “Is this as bad as this?” My suite mate asked me “Is Inglewood as bad as Compton? I mean, I don’t know. I never grew up in Compton. I tell her... that’s [Inglewood] where I grew up...I don’t even see it as bad. It’s just home to me. I’m used to it.”

Jennifer gets the sense that Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds are spoiled. She associates being spoiled with growing up in a wealthier neighborhood and being ignorant about other people’s experiences. She uses her Black suite mate as an example of someone who at times, she cannot relate to because they did not grow up in the same area. Her roommate also asks a question about Jennifer’s hometown of Inglewood that is insulting and offensive. Although her suite mate may not have meant to offend her, the question asserts her roommate’s privilege and implies Jennifer’s economic struggle. It creates a hierarchy with the more privileged suite mate coming from a “good” area as opposed to Jennifer coming from a “bad” area. It places a value judgment on the city where Jennifer is from and her own home by extension. These class differences can interfere with Black students being able to connect with one another. Similarly, Black students from low-income backgrounds also spoke about feeling, at times, disconnected from other students from more privileged backgrounds.

Solidly middle-class: Meeting Struggle that Disrupts Privilege

When solidly middle-class students interacted with Black students from different economic backgrounds, they became aware that these students were less privileged than they were. Many solidly middle-class students spoke in great detail about students they met that faced financial difficulty. These interactions may hold particular meaning for this group because experiences of economic struggle sit in direct contrast to their own experiences (although this may vary depending upon each student's level of privilege struggle). Black students from solidly middle-class students saw the struggle of other students exhibited through their being more money conscious (e.g. needing to save) and working "real" jobs where they worked long hours in order to financially support themselves. This reminded solidly middle-class students of their privilege relative to other students. Joshua discusses his interactions with Black students from less privileged economic backgrounds,

...They're worried about how they're going to pay for school, and all these work hours that affects their academics. Yeah, and sometimes it kind of results in them not being able to go to school here anymore, or even just taking less units, or moving off campus. Because moving off campus kind of disconnects them with what's happening on campus... I don't think it's conducive to the UCLA experience...You're constantly worrying about money, money, money. And I can never really relate to that because my parents really never wanted me to worry about money. And if they didn't have it they would find a way to sacrifice themselves for me not to worry.

Joshua has noticed that Black students from less privileged backgrounds face challenges in paying for their education. He notes the consequences of this struggle: having to stop out of school, take fewer units or move off campus that can leave you disconnected from the university. Joshua cannot relate to these issues because he comes from a more privileged background relative to these students. Although he is not wealthy, Joshua's parents have the means to help

him financially if he needs it. He perceives this financial support as something his parents are willing to do instead of as something they are in a position to do. Many of his Black peers who face financial challenges at the university do not have parents who are able to provide financial support. This is not by their family's choice but simply economic reality for many students. As a Black student from a solidly middle-class background, Joshua's experiences are different from that of less privileged Black students, including those from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds.

Discussion

My findings demonstrate that Black lower middle-class students share experiences similar to that of low-income students. The backgrounds of Black lower middle-class students many of whom were once low-income, link them to their Black low-income peers. Moreover, even as they attained some upward mobility to achieve a lower middle class status, the Black lower middle-class still faced great financial instability. This financial instability works to link the Black lower middle-class and Black low-income students. Pattillo-McCoy (1999) found that financial instability links the Black lower middle-class with their low-income neighbors. Similarly, I found that the economic vulnerability of the Black lower middle-class means that they encounter financial challenges similar to that of Black low-income students.

I also document the types of financial challenges experienced by these class groups. Prior research has found that Black students experience financial challenges at the university (Chen and DesJardins, 2010; Long and Riley, 2007; St. John et al. 2005). However, these studies do not reveal the types of financial challenges Black students in different class groups experience. I find that Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds encounter challenges paying for their college expenses, particularly housing. Black students from low-income

backgrounds typically receive enough financial aid to cover their college expenses but also have the responsibility of providing economically for family members. On the other hand, Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds do not face immediate financial challenges though most have financial concerns; especially given recent budget cuts to the university.

I also found that class influenced the ways Black students perceived one another. Black students from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds felt more distance between them and their solidly middle-class peers. Students often described a “disconnect” between their backgrounds and experiences and that of the solidly middle-class. The solidly middle-class also perceived distance between themselves and their low-income and lower middle-class peers. Scholars have focused on how Black students from low-income backgrounds perceive Black middle-class students (Willie, 2003; Smith and Moore, 2000). My dissertation extends this work by analyzing how lower middle and solidly middle-class Black students perceive their peers of different class backgrounds. In this case, Black students from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds tend to be more aligned in their perceptions. This is likely due to their shared histories of financial struggle and instability.

In terms of meaning-making, I found that Black students from low-income and lower middle-class backgrounds drew meaning from their financial struggles. Both groups used their economic vulnerability as motivation to excel at the university and permanently change their class status. They recognized that their being in college placed them in a position to obtain social mobility. Lacy (2007) focuses on how middle and upper middle class Black professionals make meaning of their backgrounds and construct class based identities. This finding expands this work by examining how Black low-income and lower middle-class students make sense of their class background. Lacy (2007) also found that middle and upper middle class Black

professionals drew distinctions between themselves and others from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. I found that Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds recognized their privilege but also felt compelled to work hard as many led “comfortable” lives but did not live with excess wealth. As a result, Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds did not draw very rigid boundaries between themselves and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

This may be due to the fact that most students were from the solidly middle-class; only a handful of students in the solidly middle-class group had excess wealth and could be classified as closer to upper middle-class. In addition, there is more class diversity at UCLA, a public research university. Black students have been exposed to others from different class backgrounds. It is possible that at private universities that tend to attract wealthier Black students, the class distinctions might be more pronounced with students forming very rigid class-based identities.

In sum, the connections between Black low-income and lower middle-class students are exhibited through the types of financial challenges that they encounter, the ways that they make meaning of their class background and perceive their Black peers from different class groups. These findings underscore the argument that financial instability leads to fluid boundaries that create similarities between Black lower middle-class and low-income students and shape more distinctive boundaries between them and their solidly middle-class peers.

These findings challenge the homogenizing of Blacks by highlighting the different types of experiences Black students have at the university. The experiences of the solidly middle-class differ greatly from that of low-income and lower middle-class Black students. It further signifies how class background shapes experiences within the higher education context. This work also draws attention to two overlooked groups within higher education: lower middle-class and

solidly middle-class Black students. The experiences of these two groups have been largely ignored in studies of Black undergraduate students. However, their experiences illuminate some of the important issues they face. In particular, Black lower middle-class students faced financial challenges that were similar to that of Black low-income students. Some of these issues included family responsibility and working multiple jobs on campus. These issues can affect the retention of Black low-income and lower middle-class students at the university.

In response to these issues, financial need could be re-conceptualized to provide more aid for the lower middle-class. Support programs could also be developed to help students deal with the challenges of supporting themselves and their families while at the university. Moreover, my findings demonstrate class differences in the ways that Black students make meaning of their class background and perceive one another. These differences can lead to tension among Black students. University seminars and group dialogues can be instituted around these issues so that Black students get the opportunity to talk across class differences, lessen tension and further build community. By understanding class differences among Black students, universities can better serve this student population and increase their retention in higher education.

Chapter 3

“To be Black means Giving Back:” Black Racial Identity, Campus Context and Cultural Taxation at the University

One important aspect of Black student’s lives at UCLA is their racial identity. Racial identity determines where students “fit” within the Black social fabric of UCLA. It also influences their sense of belonging to the larger Black campus community. At UCLA, Black students have to negotiate their racial identity in a context that is traditionally hostile to Black students (e.g. admissions issues, racial microaggressions) and where there are few Blacks among the student population. I argue that this context (low numbers) creates rigid boundaries around Black racial identity that Black students have to negotiate in their everyday lives.

I find that Black students at UCLA encounter an expectation from their peers that they be connected to the Black on-campus community and subsequently give back to the campus Black community as well as the larger Black community. Black students become “connected” in three main ways: participating in Black student organizations, attending Black student events and having Black social networks. Students’ ability to meet these expectations of Black racial identity could be described in one of three ways: the connected, constrained, or barely visible. These categories reveal the type of relationship that students have with the Black community on campus.

Connected students are able to meet expectations of Black racial identity by remaining closely tied to other Black students, social events, and campus groups. The Constrained face more challenges meeting expectations of Black racial identity because they have responsibilities that inhibit their being able to maintain connections with the Black campus community. The Barely Visible fail to meet expectations of Black racial identity due to their lack of comfort

and/or their alienation from the Black community. After providing a review of the relevant literature, I will explain how these three social categories are constructed at UCLA. I outline the expectations around Black racial identity and actions that work to shape these social categories. I also demonstrate how these social categories are related to particular expressions of Black racial identity and racial authenticity.

Literature Review

Racial identity can be defined as a shared a common racial connection with those of the same or similar racial background (Helms, 1993). However, racial identity can have different meanings to different social actors. With specific regard to Black racial identity, scholars have found that it can be defined in a multitude of ways (Pattillo, 2007; Willie, 2003). For example, scholars have documented the differences among Blacks in terms of political ideology and views on social mobility (Dawson, 2001; Young, 2004). Within these conflicts, people make meaning of Blackness and draw boundaries around the actions and agendas that are “for” the Black community. Pattillo (2007) argues that the making of Blackness and a Black community are projects; people are continuously contesting, challenging and inventing definitions of Blackness and directions for the Black community. Pattillo’s (2007) work pushes us to think about Blackness as a constructed process that continues to be made and re-made. The ways in which Blacks choose to define Blackness and goals for the Black community are all a part of the making of Black racial identity.

Even though there are multiple ways of defining Blackness, a shared history can create a sense of connection among the group. Dawson (1994) theorized that a historical legacy of oppression has created a sense of linked fate among Blacks. For example, the historical and continued racism and inequalities that Blacks have experienced in the U.S. lead many to feel that

their own fate is tied to that of the race. Those who have gained some mobility and access to resources feel as though they must give back to other Blacks. For many Blacks, their racial identity is connected to a sense of responsibility to give back to other Blacks. In this way, racial identity can be viewed as something that is expressed through our actions and behaviors.

Jackson (2001) argues that racial identity is performed in that these performances are often used to “make sense of racial affinities, politics and interests within the Black community.” How racial identity is expressed or performed links people to the larger group or conversely it may mark people as outside the group. If racial identity is not expressed in particular ways, it can mark people as not valid members of the community. Expectations of racial identity and how it is expressed become important in marking group membership. Applying these ideas to Black students, we do not know how these expectations of Black racial identity, particularly that of giving back to the Black community, might manifest within higher education, specifically within historically White universities.

Context plays an important role in influencing expectations of Black racial identity. Prior research has explored racial identity in a variety of contexts (Lacy, 2007; Butterfield, 2004; Warikoo, 2004). However, few studies have explored racial identity within a higher education context (Wilie, 2003). The context of a historically White university is a particularly interesting site to examine Black racial identity because Black students are fewer in number. The context for Black students at historically White universities is that they are largely underrepresented (Harper, 2006; Person and Christensen, 1996; Allen, 1992). They also have low retention and graduation rates (Harper, 2006; Person and Christensen, 1996; Allen, 1992). In California, Black students have been found to be “excluded the underserved” from the state’s higher education system, as well as throughout earlier levels of education (Allen et al. 2009). Given the issues of

under-representation in these contexts, how might Black racial identity develop and be expressed among Black students?

Few studies have examined Black racial identity within higher education. An earlier work of Gurin and Epps (1975) found that Black racial identity leads to collective action on behalf of the group. This collective action was expressed through participating in Black student groups and engaging in activism on campus. However, in this work, the authors focus on racial identity development at an individual level. It does not examine how context shapes expectations of Black racial identity. Taking a sociological approach to this issue, I analyze how the higher education context influences expectations of Black racial identity.

In her study, Willie (2003) found that Black students had different views on the meaning of Blackness. Because of this variation, they often encouraged each other “to expand and contract” these definitions explicitly and sometimes implicitly. Definitions of Blackness were constantly being negotiated within these interactions. Willie does not focus on the students’ expectations of Black racial identity and how Black racial identity is subsequently expressed. In addition, Willie (2003) does not provide a systematic analysis of Black racial identity within the higher education context. I focus on the expectations of Black racial identity that Black students experience at the university.

Black racial identity is often expressed by Black students through their participation in counter-spaces. These are academic and social spaces, free from racial microaggressions, where Black students can support one another (Torres and Charles, 2004; Willie, 2003; Solorzano, 2000; Gossett et al. 1998). These spaces can provide academic and cultural enrichment as well as provide outlets for Black students to voice their concerns about the campus climate among peers who have had similar experiences. Counter-spaces include Black student organizations,

institutionalized university programs that serve the needs of Black students, historically Black fraternities and sororities, peer groups and Black student-organized academic study halls (Solorzano et al. 2000). For some students, their involvement in Black student programs and activities indicate their level of commitment and connectedness to the Black community both inside and outside the university, a demonstration of Dawson's (1994) concept of "linked fate." For example, if Black students are expected to maintain connections with the Black student community on campus, participating in counter spaces such as Black student organizations would be one way of expressing Black racial identity and meeting this expectation.

However, this activism can also be a burden to Black students, particularly if they feel that they have to participate in these spaces in order to demonstrate their Blackness. Joseph and Hirshfield (2011) and Padilla (1994) have studied the issue of "cultural taxation" when examining the experiences of faculty of color. Faculty of color are often called upon to mentor numerous students of color and sit on several diversity committees in addition to their other faculty responsibilities because there are so few of them. This can lead to "burn-out." In a similar way, Black students may also experience "cultural taxation," feeling as though they are expected to participate in Black student groups because they are also few in number and fulfill their student responsibilities which can result in burnout.

Moreover, not all Black students will necessarily be able to meet these expectations. Those students who grew up with few links to the Black community may feel less close to other Black students on campus (Smith and Moore, 2000). As a result, they may not feel comfortable participating in Black student organizations and socializing with other Black students. Their Black peers may think of these students as less "racially authentic." Racial authenticity can be defined as acceptance and recognition as a legitimate member of the group (Hunter, 2005).

Conversely, if a student's racial authenticity is called into question, they can then be viewed as a "sell-out" (Kennedy, 2008; Hunter, 2005; Willie, 2003). Hunter (2005) applies the concept of "racial authenticity" to skin color. Few studies have examined how expectations of Black racial identity may lead students to view particular actions and behaviors as "racially authentic." I will analyze how expectations of Black racial identity are connected to ideas of racial authenticity among Black students at UCLA.

UCLA is a particularly compelling site to examine Black racial identity. After the passage of Proposition 209 in California in 1996 banning the usage of race in higher education admissions, the numbers of Black and other students of color dropped dramatically. In 2006, only ninety-six Black students enrolled in the freshman class drawing attention to an admissions and enrollment crisis. Concerned students, alumni, faculty, and administrators worked together to bring more Black students to campus. While the numbers of Black freshmen at UCLA increased to 203 in the fall of 2007, the Black student population at the university today remains extremely low compared to the Black population in Los Angeles County and in the state of California. This raises the question as to how Black identity is expressed in an environment that has not only become increasingly non-Black but where the very presence of Black students at the university has been questioned, contested, and challenged. This context may create greater pressure and expectations for Black students to be of service to the community and help improve access to the university for other Black students.

Findings

The Connected

One social category that was particularly salient in my analysis was that of being "connected" to the Black community on campus. Many students spoke of being connected or

“involved” with the Black community in some form. The most common way that Black students become “connected” is through their involvement in Black student organizations. In fact, many Black students said that involvement in Black student organizations was an expectation that Black peers had of each other. Students often encountered this expectation when they first arrived on campus. Will describes his experience:

Tell me about your experience with student organizations when you first arrived on campus? That was the whole advent of “we were the resurgence of Black UCLA,” 206 my year came in, 206 enrolled, that is. So it was like they expected us to be really proactive, like you guys got to keep it going. Fight the good fight, hoorah, hurrah. So I jumped on the bandwagon. I worked for an outreach program...Not because I wanted to. I did, but I’m Black, I go to UCLA, I got to give back to Blacks... – so caught up on we got to give back because we’re Black at UCLA.

When Will first arrived on campus, he participated in a summer program for underrepresented freshmen students like many of his Black peers. In this program, Black students learn about the different organizations on campus including those that are geared towards the access and retention of Black students at UCLA and those working with local Black communities in Los Angeles. Will decides to participate in these groups because he is expected to as a Black student. This expectation is rooted in the fact that UCLA has historically enrolled low numbers of Black students especially after the passage of Proposition 209 in 1996. If there are not enough Black students to carry on outreach and advocacy work, these student groups will cease to exist and the numbers of Black students at UCLA may plummet even lower. Black student organizations strive to stay alive by actively recruiting new Black admits every year. Many of the Black students I interviewed said that they were aware that this expectation existed for Black students because they experienced it themselves or heard about it from other Black students.

Will seems to feel this expectation most strongly because he entered UCLA amid the widely known controversy over Black student admissions. In the fall of 2006, only ninety-six

Black students enrolled at UCLA. Concerned students, alumni and faculty rallied to increase university admission and enrollment of Black students. Much of this outreach was carried out by Black student organizations. Will arrived at UCLA in the fall of 2007 where outreach efforts had worked to increase Black student enrollment to 206. Because of drastically low enrollment in the year prior, Will and his entering freshmen class were strongly urged to participate in Black student groups in order to support these access and retention efforts. As Will recalls, they were told “you guys got to keep it going.”

Will also points to the idea that because he is a Black student at UCLA, he is supposed to “give back” and help other Blacks gain access to the university. This implies that being involved in Black student organizations is a way of asserting one’s Blackness, of being connected to the Black community. Participating in Black student organizations is a way of expressing one’s racial authenticity. It marks them as a member of the Black student community at UCLA and provides them with a sense of belonging. Through participating in Black student organizations, students “give back” to other Blacks and in doing so, become members of that community. Within the involvement expectation, there appears to be an underlying assumption that Black students need to acknowledge their privilege in being at UCLA and accordingly, must help those who are less privileged. It becomes one’s responsibility to provide resources and outreach to others. This marks students as a racially authentic member of the community. Even though Will seemed to be ambivalent about participating in these groups at first, he ultimately chose to do so because he knew that this was expected of Black students. This was one way that Will asserted his Blackness among his peers and became integrated into the Black student community at UCLA.

In addition to the expectation of involvement, Black students mark themselves as racially authentic in other ways: through attending Black student events and maintaining Black social networks. In this way, students become a part of the “connected” at UCLA; establishing and maintaining ties to the Black student community. It marks them as an “authentic” member of the Black student community on campus. Attending Black student events becomes important because it works to keep Black student organizations active and it serves as a way to foster community on campus. Many Black students believe that they are expected to support these events which can range from admit weekend (where newly admitted Black students are invited to campus) to Black fraternity/sorority parties. They know that they are expected “to be seen” at these events and may be questioned by their peers if they do not attend. Marissa recalls her experience:

“I feel like the other black students expect me to be at events more. I mean they’ve gotten used to me not being there now. But, yeah, they definitely had that expectation before. And whenever I don’t see them, it’s like, “Where have you been? Why aren’t you here?” *Events meaning – what kind of events?* Just the black student events. So they expect me to volunteer for Admit weekend...They expect me to go to the African Women’s Collective meetings. Or I think they had an ASP party last weekend, or something, so stuff like that.”

When Marissa first arrived on campus, she was expected to attend different events geared towards Black students. For various reasons (which I will discuss later), she has not participated in Black student groups or attended Black student events. Although Marissa maintains, “they are used to her not being there,” her Black peers still ask her why she is not present at these events and encourage her to attend. The fact that they ask her why she has not attended Black student events signals to Marissa that she is expected to do so. The questioning of why she does not attend events is indicative of her peers’ fear that if they do not get enough Black students at these functions, they will cease to exist. Attending Black student events would also work to integrate

Marissa into the Black community on campus. This is another main way that Black students become part of “the connected” at UCLA.

While being involved in Black student groups and attending Black student events led to the formation of Black social networks for many, I also interviewed a few Black students who were not very involved in Black student groups or had peripheral involvement in these spaces. These students often wanted to be more involved in Black student organizations but were more shy and reserved so they did not quickly join them. In addition, because they were not deeply ingrained in the Black community, sometimes they were not knowledgeable about events that were taking place or groups that existed. However, they still maintained friendships and connections with Black students on campus and would often be friends or be seen (as I saw them) hanging around with others who were more involved. These interactions and relationships helped to keep them connected. Maintaining Black social networks is yet another way that students become tied to the Black community on campus. This is in contrast to the “barely visible,” those that are not as connected with the Black community on campus which I will discuss later in the chapter.

Why get involved?: Connections and Community

The expectation of involvement that Black students encounter when they enter the university plays a role in their actually choosing to become involved in Black student organizations/attend Black student events on campus. However, there are other factors that also influence whether Black students become involved in the Black community on campus. One of the main factors that facilitated students becoming involved was through already established connections. Many of the students said that they knew people in Black student organizations and/or who attended Black student events and this provided them with entre into the Black

community. Several of the students maintained that these connections were the reason why they chose to become involved in Black student organizations or decided to attend events in the first place. Chante explains how she chose the student groups that she is now a part of:

...It's almost like when you come here, even for different groups I've noticed, you pick your groups based on race and ethnicity...each ethnic group has their own community service group, and it's kind of like that's how people are separated...So I was basically appointed to that program, and then my mentor at the time when I was a freshman, it was like, "You're gonna help organize this." So that's what I did. If I had it my way, I probably would have still helped organize some of that stuff. I probably wouldn't have been so invested. But now, once I got into it, I kind of fell in love with it, in love with the people and the students.

For Chante, a mentor plays a critical role in facilitating her involvement within Black student organizations. Chante says that she was first “appointed” to the program implying that someone or a group of people, helped to bring her into this group. Then, her mentor assigned her a role within the group, further sealing her position within this space. Chante admits that she probably would have been involved in this group to some degree but she seems to credit her mentor with really bringing her into the space. Chante also mentions something very important- that many different racial/ethnic groups have their own organizations on campus and people often choose to become a part of these groups based on their racial/ethnic background. This racial structuring of campus organizations may have played a role in Chante choosing to become involved in this group as well.

However, it seems that having connections within these groups have contributed to Chante becoming involved in the first place and also to her level of involvement within the group. Many Black students like Chante also spoke of having friends or other students they knew within these groups that led to their involvement. Even if students were not very involved in organizations (such as athletes), several of them knew peers who organized events on campus and these relationships often facilitated their attendance at these events. These connections are

significant because they push students to become involved in organizations and support Black student events.

On the other hand, if students lack these connections, they are far less likely to become integrated into the Black community through organizations and events. The organizations and events act as a gateway to the Black community on campus. It is how students socialize and come to know one another. A few students I interviewed spoke about their lack of connection in these groups and that they felt they needed someone to bring them into the fold. For example, in her interview, Janet mentioned that she hated her first year because she lacked friends and was not connected to other Black students. It actually took Janet meeting two other Black women on campus to bring her into Black student spaces. She is now a little bit more connected to these groups and attends Black student events making her experience at the university less alienating (although she still perceives the Black community on campus as cold due to her experience).

Many students mentioned FSP (Freshmen Summer Program), a summer program geared towards newly arriving underrepresented freshmen, as a way that they came to meet other Black students and thus learn about Black student organizations. Janet did not partake in FSP when she arrived at the university and thus lacked access to Black students networks. For students who do not attend FSP, becoming involved in the Black community and therefore, one of the “connected” is significantly more challenging. Some transfer students also talked about how they lacked the connections that worked to bring students into the groups and events. Even though many transfer students participate in a similar program for transfer students (TSP), several of them claimed that it was more challenging to join Black student groups because most of the Black students in them already knew each other as freshmen. Some transfer students felt that they could not break into the cliques that were already established in these organizations.

Another important factor that drew Black students to become involved in Black student organizations/events was community. In the interviews, many Black students mentioned that these groups represented the Black community and served as places to locate Black students on campus. Students often became involved in these groups or attended events to seek out this community. Tiffany is a student-athlete who was not able to become very involved on campus because of her busy athletic schedule. However, she attended several meetings for Black student groups on campus because she was interested in them. She also expressed a desire to connect with the larger Black student community on campus.

They had...black student union and then they had something in Campbell –SHAPE or AAP or something like that, but those was just kind of hard because it conflicted with basketball...I went to several meetings...and I met people through those groups, but I was never able to actually join a group besides basketball...Those groups are predominately African American, and they actually were trying to help you. You know, you have some groups that have so many people and they don't know who you are. It was like 50 of us but we all knew who each other were. People were trying to help you. It wasn't every woman for themselves, every person for themselves. They were cool people; it was people that you could actually be friends with in the long run, and rely on them...

Even though Tiffany is a student-athlete immersed in an entirely different world than students who are non-athletes (as I will discuss later in the chapter), she still sought out a Black student community. When she first arrived on campus, she attended organization meetings but her schedule did not allow her to pursue a role within these groups. However, Tiffany made some connections that she has sustained throughout her four years at UCLA and remarked that one of the students helped her get an internship. Tiffany also explains what she gained from those spaces recognizing that students were available to help each other and that it was a tight-knit community where people knew who you were. In addition to Tiffany, many non-athletes (as well as her student athlete peers) became involved in Black student groups and/or attended events that

these groups put on to have a sense of community. In fact, the tradition of Black Wednesday appears to have gotten started out of a need to build and maintain Black community on campus.

Damon describes Black Wednesday this way:

We have Black Wednesday. Every Wednesday from 12:00 to 2:00, it's Black Wednesday. It's a block of time where pretty much all the Black people will come to the center of campus and just hang out...Some Wednesdays, we have actual planned coordinated events. Somebody brings out their dominoes table. We play cards, have a speaker going. So Black Wednesday is a way when we can meet people, check in, "Hi, how are you doing? How's that midterm going?" And meet new people...

The significance of Black Wednesday is that it brings Black students together. It is the one day a week where students are bound to see Black students on campus. In the interviews, several students remarked that they typically do not see many "Black faces" on campus and that they feel lucky if they see just a handful walking around campus on an everyday basis. Black Wednesday ensures Black students that they will see each other that day and be able to connect with one another. Damon points out that Black Wednesday acts as both a social and supportive space for Black students. Students play cards and listen to music while also checking in with each other about how their classes are going and how they are doing.

This is a necessary space given the alienation and racism that many Black students experience on campus. Many of the students had stories of racial incidents and isolation that has happened to them and their peers on campus. Black Wednesday serves as a space free from these racial microaggressions where students can be themselves (although university policing of this event may occur given that it takes place right in the center of campus). Students can also offer both academic and social support to each other whether it be sharing class notes or discussing racial microaggressions that have occurred on campus. Students may also just want to hang out and be around each other and Black Wednesday provides them with a venue to do that.

Furthermore, Black Wednesday is significant in that it asserts the place of Black students at the

university. This is where Black students claim their space within a university setting that often marginalizes them. Black students signal to the campus that they are a cohesive group of UCLA students and that they belong on the campus as much as their non-Black peers. Several students in the interview attended Black Wednesday and other events to connect with the Black community on campus. They also joined Black student organizations as a way of finding community as well.

Responsibility

In addition to connections and community, students cited responsibility as another reason why they joined Black student organizations and/or attended Black student events. Many students felt it was their responsibility to give back to other Blacks, particularly those in the local community. They recognized that they were privileged in being able to access UCLA and work towards their college degrees. Several of these students came from communities that were struggling economically and educationally due to lack of resources. Students saw it as their job to “pay it forward” by devoting their time in college to community work and access efforts on campus. Christian, a third year student, explains why he chose to become heavily involved with Black student organizations that outreach to underserved communities:

I think because I always told myself that I’m privileged to come to this school because I felt like if I would have went to my home school, I wouldn’t be here. If I wouldn’t have said to my counselor, in passing, I want to go to UCLA and Stanford, I don’t think I would be here. And I don’t think I would be as prepared...I think that the reason why it always goes back to education is because that’s just the starting place. The institution of education itself is pretty much going to make or break youth. So that there, that’s one thing that I’m very – I feel very connected to.

Christian reflects upon his own educational experiences growing up and realizes that he is fortunate enough to have had some privileges along the way that have helped to bring him to UCLA. He attended a high school outside of his local community that had a strong academic

reputation. He had a supportive college counselor there who worked to facilitate his application process to UCLA. This is a very different experience from many students in his local community who attend severely under-resourced schools. Christian has become passionate about education and one of the Black student groups he works with, conducts outreach to local high schools providing students with the support they need for academic success and to attend college in the future.

Like Christian, many Black students I interviewed recognized the injustices that plagued various Black communities and they felt compelled to take up these issues as college students. Black student groups on campus worked with local communities to provide educational support, artistic outlets and health resources for Black and other groups of color (e.g. Latinos). This sense of responsibility that many Black students feel is linked to the expectations of involvement that they encounter when they enter the university (as mentioned earlier). It is also connected to issues of racial authenticity. Being responsible to and for the Black community may be a way that students claim their Blackness.

Political scientist Michael Dawson's theory of linked fate (1994) might apply here as he found that Blacks believed that their fate was tied to that of their race. Black students may also feel this type of connection. As a group, Blacks have historically suffered severe inequality and racial discrimination that still persist to this day in various forms. There is also a historical legacy of notable Black figures that have achieved educational, economic or political success who have given back to Black society. Many Black students recognize this legacy and understand that they are responsible for helping to support others. This sense of responsibility may also be an expectation that Black students feel from the larger Black society because of this history- that they are supposed to give back and must do so. In the interviews, nearly all Black students spoke

of wanting to give back to the Black community in some way in the future, even those who were not socialized around Blacks and not as racially conscious as others.

Furthermore, students who were not involved in community outreach groups also signified the importance of supporting Black student organizations or events on campus. Several student-athletes made attempts to attend Black student events and other students involved in Black student groups that were not directly based in community outreach, also maintained that they should support these spaces on campus. This is another way that Black students felt responsible to the larger Black community as well as providing access to the university for prospective Black students.

Different Experiences

In the interviews, a few students mentioned that they joined Black student organizations in order to have a different experience than what they were used to. These students tended to be from predominantly White areas and growing up, they had very little interaction with Blacks. They viewed Black student groups as an opportunity to be around other Blacks and learn more about their background. This applied to both biracial students and those who had two Black parents. Regardless of racial ancestry, some Black students who were not socialized around other Blacks chose to become involved in Black student organizations as a means of connecting with their Black peers. Keshawn explains why he decided to pledge a historically Black fraternity:

Well, I wanted to see what it's like to be with ambitious and motivated Black people, because I grew up around ambitious and motivated Whites and Asians for a majority of my life. So I just wanted to try something different.

Keshawn consciously chooses to become a member of a historically Black fraternity in order to be around other Black students. He grew up in a predominately White and Asian environment where he had little interaction with other Blacks. Becoming a part of this group allows Keshawn

the opportunity to develop relationships with “ambitious and motivated” Black students. It may also inform his sense of racial identity. Many Black student organizations, especially fraternities, have long historical legacies where Black leaders have been cultivated. As a member of this group, Keshawn becomes a part of this historical Black legacy. Having not grown up around Blacks, Keshawn’s membership exposes him to Black history, networks and the mission of these groups. His participation in this organization can give him the “different experience” he is looking for; allowing him the space to explore his Black identity.

Although some students joined Black student organizations in order to have this type of experience, others expressed a lot more hesitation to becoming a part of these groups. Several students expressed wanting a connection to the Black community on campus through joining Black student groups. Yet, they stopped just short of taking action to get involved in these spaces. Scott describes why he would be interested in participating in Black student groups:

There’s something I feel I’d get out of being a part of my community because if I’m gonna identify myself as black, there’s something behind that that means something. And I think the only way I can enrich that and help that grow and satisfy that need to identify myself as that, is to share myself with other people who identify themselves the same way. Because that’s the only way I’m gonna be able to define a conclusive statement as to what being black is...I’d like to find out what that means, and where I fit into that. So it’s kinda like Tetris, you know what I’m saying, and there’s this slot, and I’m moving on my way down, and I know that there’s a space that I can fit in, get in and that’s my slot, and I just wanna do that.

Scott’s desire to join Black student organizations seems to come out of his wanting to figure out his Black racial identity and explore what that means at UCLA. In the interview, he points out that Blackness meant something different at his high school as opposed to college. Scott wants to figure out what his Blackness means in this particular context. Interestingly, he describes his identity journey as a game of Tetris, trying to see where he fits in. This desire to figure out his identity may also be particularly salient for Scott because he is biracial. He essentially straddles

two worlds (Black and White) and is trying to make sense of his place within both. Scott also maintains that in order to explore his Black identity he needs to be around other Blacks. Black student organizations provide a venue where Black identities can be cultivated and Scott sees these spaces as being a part of his own identity development.

Despite his own self-awareness, Scott has not pursued involvement in Black organizations. He fears that other Black students would not accept him and that the focus and determination of Black students at the university actually intimidated him a bit. Scott did not spend much time growing up around Blacks so he seemed to lack comfort being around groups of Black students. In fact, several students echoed Scott's sentiment: they felt Black student organizations were important and they wanted to be involved but chose not to because they were uncomfortable being in these spaces. This typically occurred for Black students who were biracial and/or had little contact with the Black community growing up.

That is not to say that these students did not have cordial or even friendly relationships with other Black students. However, larger group settings appeared to intimidate them for fear that they might be judged or not accepted. This concern has some warrant as sometimes, Black students who do not meet expectations are judged (as I will describe later in the chapter). However, some of these concerns also derive from these student's stereotypic ideas about Blackness and the fear that they will not "measure up." These students expressed a strong desire to have a "different experience" by joining Black student experiences but not everyone felt completely comfortable doing so.

Racialized steering

Another factor that may play a role in why Black students choose to become involved in Black student organizations is the racialized steering that happens on campus. A few students

spoke about how different organizations at UCLA advertise to the student body. Bruin Walk is a pathway at the center of campus that most students pass on a daily basis as they walk to and from class. It is also located near the student union that sees a lot of student traffic as well. Student representatives from different campus groups (athletic, artistic, ethnic-affiliated, community service, Greek life) will stand on Bruin Walk and distribute fliers to students as they pass by, advertising their organizations. However, several Black students pointed out that “selective” fliering takes place as student representatives will look at students as they pass by and choose not to hand out fliers to particular people. Black students said that many campus groups and especially, historically White fraternities and sororities will purposefully not distribute fliers to them. Sasha describes how she has experienced this “selective” fliering process:

...I held off on joining black organizations until I realized that white organizations really didn't want me either. I was interested in sororities. But every time I walked on Bruin Walk, it was always, I'm walking up, and I'm expecting they want to try everyone but they sort of look and they don't try you, they try the next person. They don't approach you. You need to approach them. Pretty much a lot of organizations do that. I think they think of who they want or what person that fits their organization, and they flier to people that look like them. And so I didn't really notice that at first until I realized no sororities fliered to me. None of the snowboarding, skiing clubs fliered to me. None of the outdoor adventure clubs fliered to me. The only clubs I [received fliers] from were like ethnic clubs. But none of the mainstream clubs fliered to me. So that was when I first realized, how do you know I don't want to join Kappa Gamma or whatever the other sororities are?

Sasha's experience exemplifies the racialized steering from campus organizations that takes place at UCLA. Groups choose not to flier to Black students because they do not see them as fitting the type of student they want in their group. This type of racial microaggression is rather severe because it sends a message to Black students that they are not wanted on campus and do not truly belong there, Sasha points out that this applies to historically White fraternities and sororities as well as other “mainstream” organizations. Many student groups at UCLA racialize

their recruitment process and by not fliering to Black students. By not fliering to them, they steer them towards the spaces that are welcoming to them: Black student groups and other organizations for students of color.

Sasha also has developed a critique of this racialized steering when she asks “how do you know I do not want to join Kappa Gamma or whatever the other sororities are?” She criticizes these groups for making racialized assumptions about Black students. In this situation, Sasha and other Black students are steered towards Black student groups that can operate as safe spaces for them free of racial microaggressions. At the same time, this racialized steering limits Black student’s pursuits of opportunities that they may genuinely be interested in. These are opportunities that should be made available to everyone on campus but in reality are not.

Involvement: Gains and “Grooming”

There are personal gains to participating in these groups. Some students talked about how these organizations gave them the opportunity to develop their leadership and organizational skills. They felt that these skills would serve them well after they graduate when they are looking for jobs or applying to graduate school. Michelle describes the benefits that she has gained from participating in Black student groups,

The positives are that I got into a really close social network of African American students ...the experiences, meeting so many people. The affiliation that we have with other organizations, as well, just learning how the school functions and students and their participation, and just how you can see a student go from being a student to being the head of something, and then go from the head of something and graduating and then being an advisor for something. You see it makes leaders and also makes the people that they create to run the schools. So they’re set out to be providers for the university. Inevitably, you give back to the school some way, somehow.

Michelle seems to take pride in the work that she and her fellow students have done. They have been active on campus learning how the university functions and how to accomplish their goals within this structure. She also describes how students move through the ranks in Black student

organizations, acquiring the skills that will eventually make them the leaders of these groups. These students sometimes move into leadership roles after they graduate. Michelle and other students who are involved in these groups learn skills that they draw upon at UCLA and once they leave the university. As Michelle put it, she and her friends are likely to become the people who influence school policy as well as stakeholders in their own communities.

In the above excerpt, Michelle alludes to Black students moving up the ranks within these organizations. In my interviews, several students spoke of this “grooming” process. This particularly applies to the larger Black student groups that have sizable student staffs. Students will enter into the organization at a lower level position and then gradually, they are asked to take on more responsibilities and acquire new skills that bring them to the next leadership role within the group. This grooming process takes place in order to ensure that there will be people in place to make sure that the group’s goals are accomplished. It also works to ensure that there will be someone in place to take over once the person occupying that position graduates. The grooming process works to sustain Black student leadership within the groups.

Some students appear to take on these roles without reservation while others struggle with their own desire to step outside the organizations. Christian and Chante are two student leaders who are heavily involved in Black campus outreach groups. They both enjoy the work but one of them acknowledges the challenges that come along with being so deeply immersed in Black student organizations at UCLA. They describe the grooming process this way:

I’m a busy bee. I’m just like – I don’t know. I just am. It’s like a lot of the times, everything just sort of leads into each other. So it’s like if you go to Shape, [they’re] grooming you to be ASU staff. ASU staff in this position, then you have to be on the committee because that’s part of your responsibilities. And then the fraternity, chapter leadership the year before, now you’re going to be a part of regional leadership. So a lot of it has been sort of like from my first year, I’ve been tracked.

-Christian

It's really, really exhausting after a while, and it becomes like – it's almost like your path is laid out for you, for a black student who's involved. So, you're going to do this in your first year. You're going to do this in your second year. By fourth year you'll be on ASU staff, and you'll be doing this. And it's kind of like, what about everything else? I want to go abroad and I want to do research, and I want to do dance, and I want to meet people other than black people. And so that's a negative. Like, they just keep pulling from the same pool of people. And then once they pull you into it, it's like you become guilty if you don't. Because it's you're almost like, Well, if I don't do it, who's going to do it? And so that becomes your mentality, and it sucks because you feel guilty if you don't.

-Chante

Christian's excerpt reveals how he was groomed to become a student leader on campus. He acknowledges that from his freshman year, he has been "tracked" into these roles. He seems to accept his roles willingly and without question. He attributes his involvement in part, to his personality as someone who likes to keep busy. In contrast, Chante struggles with her involvement in these groups because they preclude her from being able to do much else. Chante highlights the negative consequences to tracking because if your "path is laid out for you," you really can not get involved in other groups that you might be interested in. Chante points to the fact that the same people often do the work in these groups; a reality rooted in the low numbers of Black students at UCLA and the fact that the students undertake the access work that the university could take more responsibility for. She also talks about feeling guilty if you refuse to participate in these roles. There simply are not enough Black students to take on this work so even though Chante wants to explore other interests, she faces intense feelings of guilt. This guilt may be connected to a fear of "selling out" and to issues of racial authenticity because Blackness at UCLA is constructed around involvement. In addition, Christian has also struggled at times with his commitment to these groups.

While in the interview, Christian spoke of taking on these leadership roles willingly, he has had conversations with me where he expressed feeling stressed by all of the work that he was doing on campus. Many times, he was simply inundated with all of his commitments and while

he was able to balance his academics and leadership roles, he grappled with feelings of stress and anxiety. I often encouraged him to say no to some of these roles if he felt they were too demanding on his time but he would often insist that he was the only one who could do the work. This may be a reflection on the low numbers of Black students at UCLA and Christian's own concerns about "selling out" and maintaining his racial authenticity. Over time, I noticed that Christian started "grooming" other students to take on his roles and delegating some of his work to other students so that he could effectively manage these commitments. Grooming other students keeps these groups active and affords the student the opportunity to develop leadership skills and networks on campus. However, there are also consequences to this work: burn-out and some students feeling like their responsibility to these groups limits their opportunities to participate in predominately non-Black activities.

Tensions

As mentioned above, sometimes the expectation of involvement in Black student organizations and events can cause tension among Black students at UCLA. Students may feel pressure to become involved in Black student groups and attend events and fulfill their academic responsibilities at the same time. These competing expectations may create added stress for students. It is difficult to balance academic and campus involvement. Leticia discusses how she experiences this pressure:

"I feel like there's a big responsibility on you to stay around and be active and show your face at events...It's so hard to get everything done for your academics, get everything done that you're going to need for longevity, like scholarships and internships, and at the same time run these organizations and go to events. And so I feel like it's definitely an added pressure that sometimes kind of stresses you out, but then at the same time I feel like it's out of fear that you might not want to associate with black people anymore."

Leticia points out the difficulties in being "active" on campus (involved in Black student organizations and attending events) and in meeting her own academic goals. She sees this

pressure as partly a result of her peers' fears that she will not want to associate with other Black students any longer and will desert the Black community. This is one way that racial boundaries are clearly marked and maintained. Involvement in predominantly Black spaces demarcates who is "in" the group and who is not.

However, there are some very real consequences for the Black community on campus if Leticia and other students decided not to participate anymore. The persistence of these groups could be in jeopardy if more students leave or minimize their involvement. Many students are already aware that there are existing divisions among Black students on campus as many (including Leticia) were quick to point out that there were athletes and those who were not involved in Black campus activities that left responsibility on the "activists" to keep these groups going.

The low numbers of Black students at UCLA make these issues a reality. Yet, it seems unfair that Black students are shouldering these responsibilities because the university has not been unable to secure "a critical mass" of Black students in the undergraduate population. While admissions policies have moved from comprehensive to holistic (where more than one admissions committee member reviews a student's entire application taking into account both academic and social circumstances), the numbers of Black students still remain shockingly low. Although the numbers of Black undergraduates enrolling at the university has increased, this was also due in large part to the efforts of Black student organizations, faculty and alumni. Further university efforts could be made to increase Black student admission and enrollment to UCLA.

Moreover, Black students should not feel overburdened to participate in these groups at the expense of their academic responsibilities. While there are definitely social and cultural benefits that students acquire from participating in these groups, they should not feel as though

they have to sacrifice their academic standing to do so. During my time at UCLA, I recall hearing about student-activists who had been placed on academic probation and were struggling academically because they were too involved on campus. This can create a serious retention issue for many Black students.

In addition, if Black students are struggling academically, they will not be positioned well to move onto graduate school and other post-baccalaureate opportunities. There are students who are able to balance both their academic and student group responsibilities, excel in their coursework and move onto graduate school. These students may have more resources and skill-sets they have developed that help them to achieve balance. However, even some of these students experience high levels of stress and anxiety in trying to do this (as I mentioned earlier). The university could provide more support for these groups and programs so that students are not over-worked. As many of these groups work on behalf of increasing Black student access to the university, UCLA could possibly increase their efforts to work on this issue, thereby alleviating some of the burden from Black students.

When these issues of balancing multiple responsibilities arise, some Black students decide to leave the student groups or scale back on some of their participation within them. They feel as though they have to break away from them in order to meet their academic obligations. This can often become a stressful decision for the student because they are making a conscious decision to depart from roles that they have had within Black student organizations for quite awhile. While most students will maintain their connection with their Black peers on campus, leaving these groups raises issues of responsibility (who will carry on this work when I am gone?) and racial authenticity (Am I a part of the Black community on campus?). Will discusses

his experience leaving a campus organization that provides resources and support for Black youth,

But the whole I work for youth, giving time to the community because you're a black UCLA student. Take out black, what are you? UCLA student. If I'm doing all this...how am I going to be an excellent UCLA student? So my hang up was, man, this is taking up my time... It's like I know what it takes to do really good, so looking back, it's like you're all asking for too much....a lot of black students get caught up in they want to give back to their community, they don't want to be a sellout. So you're going to sacrifice your academics. But really, you're selling out the black community in the worst possible way by not excelling here because they say we don't belong here. But we're here and we're not making the best of it because we're trying to give back to them. So I thought the biggest spit in the face was not having a 3.0 GPA, not having that balance. You're doing too much community work, but you don't have an excellent GPA.

After participating in one organization in his first year, Will realized that he did not have the time to devote to this activity and meet his academic responsibilities. Therefore, he made the decision to leave the group entirely. As a freshman, he needed to figure out the “hidden curriculum” of UCLA; in other words, he had to learn how to navigate the university so that he could become a successful student. Part of this realization required that he devote more time to his coursework so that he could maintain strong grades. Upon reflection, he sees that working in these groups and doing well in school appear to be at odds with each other. It is very challenging for students to do both successfully. He also discusses how community work is used as a way to “not sell out.” However, Will takes a different approach with this issue saying that he views not maintaining a strong GPA at UCLA as “selling out.” Given the controversies over Black student admissions and the racism that many Black students experience daily, Will feels that if Black students do not have good grades, they are reaffirming the belief that they “do not belong” at UCLA. He sees this as a way of “selling out” to the larger Black community.

There are also times when Black students choose to leave or maintain peripheral involvement with these groups because they want to pursue other interests and activities. This

often derives from a desire to extend their social networks beyond the Black community. When students make the decision to step away from these activities, they do so strategically. Most of them maintain a connection to the Black community on campus in some form. In other words, they do not leave the Black community entirely but rather figure out ways to pursue their interests both in and outside Black spaces. Rahim shares his experience with stepping away from some of his involvement with Black student organizations,

Everybody else expects me to be in every Black program, every Black everything, just running it or involved in it...I'm trying to burst my way out of that bubble or at least have access to go in and out as I please...Right now, I'm on the edges of my face planted on the bubble, and I can't get out. Because I'm trying to be more diverse...97% of the school does not look like me. I didn't even know at least 97 people that don't look like me. I don't know that now. And I feel that I'm trapped within this bubble, this city within a city. I feel like my frat will always keep me in a black bubble, but everything else doesn't need to be black.

In the interview, Rahim chose to leave these groups because he felt like he was being asked to carry too much responsibility. However, it appears that there may be other motivating factors as well. Rahim's social life on campus revolves around predominantly Black spaces. He wants to try to establish social networks beyond the Black community, with students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. Rahim employs a strategy of staying connected to a Black student organization (his fraternity) that allows him access to Black student networks and the other Black student groups that are affiliated with it. At the same time, he seeks involvement in other groups on campus in order to form relationships with non-Black students. While Rahim supports the mission of Black student organizations and wants to remain connected to them at some level, he takes action to move into other spaces as well. His ideal social situation is to be involved in both worlds.

Similarly, Jada also has had to learn to navigate her connection with the Black community and involvement in other groups. Jada is deeply entrenched within Black student

organizations at UCLA yet she also has a role within different spaces on campus that are predominantly non-Black. While juggling her responsibilities in these groups, she has learned to “say no” to some of the expectations of involvement regarding Black student organizations in order to participate in other groups. Jada describes her experience this way:

And there’s a [Black student organization] meeting tomorrow, but I’m also in [other organization]— And so I told them...I’m not going to be there... Some people are like... okay, I understand. And others are like...so you’re going to choose them over us ...I’m like, well, this is also important to me – I feel...I will always be there for the Black community even if I do get burned out. If you ask me, I will be there. But there are other things that I need to involve myself in, in order to be... a well-rounded individual. But they know it’s not them over us. It’s a ‘we’. It’s what can we do to help ourselves. And if that means that I should go somewhere else and learn about a different culture and do a different thing, so I can come back and help our community, then so be it.

Jada has declined attending particular Black student meetings and events so that she can participate in other activities. While she recognizes that many of her friends understand her choices, some people feel that she is “choosing them over us,” putting these activities ahead of her responsibilities to Black student organizations. However, Jada offers an alternative view of her involvement in other groups. She sees her participation in these spaces as a way of becoming “a well-rounded individual.” Being “well-rounded” may connote forming relationships with people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds as well as pursuing other interests (e.g. artistic, professional) in these groups. Jada also plans to use the knowledge and skills that she gains from her experiences in these spaces to ultimately help the Black community in the future. While she remains committed to Black student organizations, she also views her participation in different groups as working to strengthen the Black community.

Some students may be critical of the Black community on campus and this can also affect their level of participation in Black student organizations and attendance at events. Several

students I interviewed expressed their criticism of admit weekend (where newly admitted Black students are invited to campus) because they felt like it gave new students a false perception of the Black community on campus. During admit weekend, they said that many Black students came together to give the appearance of closeness when in actuality, students were not as close throughout the year. These perceptions may influence if or to what extent, some Black students become involved on campus. Janet explains her experience with the Black community at UCLA,

“If they put on programs, we’re supposed to come out. Admit weekend is coming up, they want us to put on a false persona that there is like a really strong knit black community...Because there was a couple of first years who said when they came to Admit weekend, how they felt like there was a black community because of all these efforts to make it seem like there is one. But once you get here, how it’s very cold...On a day to day basis, you really don’t have those people to go to, unless you have friends...Because with me, my first year, I really hated my first year here, just on that part alone. Most of the time, I try to go [to events]. Sometimes, I really do want to go to them. Some of them are really good. But for this Admit weekend one, I’m kind of hesitant because I don’t want to put on that false air...”

Janet offers her criticism of the Black community on campus, criticizing a “false” impression of closeness and the “cold” atmosphere among students. Janet experienced some of this alienation herself as a first year student. She did not participate in many of the programs that help students form social networks (e.g. admit weekend, the freshmen summer program) and had trouble locating a Black community on campus to connect with. However, she also points out first year students who did participate in events that are supposed to link them to other Black students but they still found that there was not really a cohesive community on campus. Although Janet tries to attend various events on campus, she is hesitant to participate in Admit weekend because she does not want to mislead newly admitted students. She has some direct criticisms of the Black community on campus and does not want to hide them. It is possible that other students like Janet may also hold criticisms of some of the Black student organizations and events on campus and this may prevent them from engaging within these spaces.

Students may also disagree ideologically with the way that some of the Black student organizations are run. This may also work to keep them from participating in these groups. Kim speaks to this issue:

“I think just us being individuals and not attacking this problem as a group... you attack the problem as a group, yet you won’t go outside your group to connect with someone that isn’t black. To let them know that we aren’t here to harm you. We’re here to have an education like you... “Kim, you’re turning your back on your people...Like you’re not involved” –I’m just like, well, when you guys have your little group activities and your plays and stuff, I’m there, but as far as forcing your will on people, I can’t support that because I don’t feel that we go about it the right way. If we want to get change, change comes with you making a step.”

Kim feels that racial issues on campus should be dealt with more on an individual level, as opposed to taking group action. As a result, she attends some Black student events but declines offering her support to others if she opposes the course of action that the group is taking.

Interestingly enough, Kim is a student-athlete on campus so her time participating within Black student groups is severely limited. However, she attends events when she can and still possesses strong opinions about the direction that Black student organizations should take when confronting racial issues on campus. I use both Kim and Janet as examples to demonstrate how diverse opinions exist among Black students at UCLA. Not everyone may meet the expectation of involvement (or they may choose to take part in some activities and not others) because they differ in ideology and are openly critical of some of the Black student organizations on campus.

Constrained

Student-Athletes

Although the expectation of involvement in Black student organizations is one major way that students become part of “the connected,” not all Black students have access to these groups. Some students are constrained from participating within these organizations even when they

express a desire to be involved. Student-athletes are one such group that face constraints in participating within these groups. They face academic and athletic schedules that are extremely demanding which allow them little time to become involved in these groups or attend events. Moreover, the university segregates athletes from the general student community precluding them from forming connected relationships with Black students who are non-athletes. Even though many Black student-athletes have Black social networks amongst each other and at some level with non-athlete Black students, the ways that the university defines them, their time and space, keep them from being well integrated into the Black non-athlete student community.

These factors work to shape the social identity of Black student-athletes as “other,” as not part of “the connected” at UCLA. They become, what I call, “the constrained.” These distinctions between athlete and non-athlete derived from Black students themselves. When I interviewed students, athlete and non-athlete alike, they drew distinctions between these identities and often described their being two separate worlds at UCLA. Giselle, a Black student-athlete explains the different lifestyles of student-athletes and non-athletes,

...We're segregated from the beginning. We can't mix. With practices - there's no way ...You don't have time to do anything or to talk to anybody else - to make friends! I don't have time to hang out with people- that's how you make friends - hanging out places, they're at Bruin Café at 2:00 in the morning. I don't see 11:00!...But the places where you would meet people normally – we don't get to meet them just because of your schedule.

Giselle's experience exemplifies that of many Black student-athletes on campus. They face such a demanding schedule that they do not have time to participate in any other activities. They also are unable to socialize late at night, as many college students tend to do because they have to be up early in the morning for athletic training. Giselle also mentions that Black student-athletes and non-athletes are “segregated from the beginning.” In many of the interviews, Black student-athletes spoke about their having separate orientations, academic counseling, events and

gatherings from Black student non-athletes. Because the athletic and non-athletic student worlds rarely mix, it makes it difficult for Black student athletes and non-athletes to form relationships with one another.

The reality of these two separate worlds inevitably poses challenges at UCLA when it comes to expectations of Black students. As I discussed earlier, many Black students felt that they were expected to be involved in Black student organizations and attend Black student events. The same expectation applies to Black student athletes. When I interviewed Black student-athletes, they were keenly aware that they were expected to participate in Black student groups. However, many of these student-athletes faced challenges in doing so because of their schedule and athletic regulations. The lack of participation by Black student-athletes in these spaces often caused tension between them and Black student non-athletes. Many Black student-athletes I interviewed claimed that Black non-athletes resented them and felt like athletes thought that “they were better than them” because they do not participate in Black student groups or attend events. Aaron explains the issues he encounters as a student-athlete, who wants to participate in Black student organizations,

“Do you ever think black students here have expectations of you? Yeah, definitely because I feel like – they actually express themselves a couple times saying, “You’re a role model to kids, and if we’re going to these high schools, you should come and talk.” I understand what they’re saying, and I wish I could do that. I really want to...I’m trying to take care of myself...because it’s like if I don’t study, I’m going to be outreaching, but I’m not going to pass the class. Then, there’s also so many regulations and rules at UCLA. You have to be careful. It’s crazy. You can’t do certain things. You can’t get rides by people if they’re affiliated in any way with anything. Some guy got a ride one mile in someone else’s car, and he got in trouble...They call it unfair advantages...”

Aaron outlines the issues involving Black student-athletes getting involved in Black student groups at UCLA. Aaron wants to get involved and mentor local Black youth. However, he points out that his busy schedule does not allow for this to happen. If he did get involved in these

community outreach efforts, he would be sacrificing his grades. As a student-athlete, he also faces particular regulations. The athletics department at UCLA closely monitors his behavior and if he commits any infraction (such as associating with agents or receiving “unfair advantages” because he is an athlete), he can get into serious trouble. Moreover, one of the athletes I interviewed was told explicitly by one of his coaches not to get involved in Black student protests over admissions because it was “too political.” This close monitoring of athletes and strict regulations may contribute to their lack of participation in Black student groups.

It is important to note that several of the Black student-athletes that I interviewed did make attempts to connect with their Black non-athlete peers. Some of them said that they periodically attend events if they have some time or occasionally stop by “Black Wednesday” (a weekly gathering of Black students on campus that I referred to earlier) to socialize. Many of them felt that the goals of Black student groups were important but at the same time, they acknowledged that they were constrained in participating in these organizations further. In this case, student-athletes occupy a “lower status” authenticity. As Black athletes, they fit stereotypical ideas of Blackness and their participation, though minimal, in some Black student activities provides them with some entry into “the connected” and “authentic” Blackness. However, they are still incredibly segregated from non-athletes and because they cannot fully immerse themselves within the Black community at UCLA, they are situated on the outskirts, as not as “authentically” Black as others.

Work and Family Responsibilities

There are other groups of Black students on campus that also face constraints to participating in Black student organizations. A few students in my sample had work and family responsibilities that left them little time to become involved in these spaces. Those with

significant work and family responsibilities tend to be transfer students who come from less privileged economic backgrounds (low-income and lower middle-class). They often have to hold multiple jobs in order to pay their college expenses. Moreover, many of these students financially support their families. As a result, these students have limited time to participate in Black student organizations and attend events. Edon describes his experience this way,

I can recall, there was a protest for the workers here on campus that I didn't go to. And people were like, "Why didn't you go? That's your thing." And I'm like, "Dude, I gotta work. I can't sit up here and just protest and try to organize all the time. There are other things outside of organizing and protesting that I'm responsible [for]... And there have been some instances where there have been meetings that I haven't been able to attend. ...When students have meetings, they're generally at night and here on campus. And that's extremely convenient for students who live here in the dorms or in university apartments, even in Palms. But my commute is that much more greater because I have to come from such a distance. So I try to tell people, "Keep that in mind as well before you try to get on my case about not being somewhere. Walk in my shoes just for ten minutes. Then you'll understand. I do a lot with the time that I can."

For a "constrained" student, Edon is actually fairly immersed in the Black community on campus. He is an active participant in some organizations and maintains close relationships with several Black students on campus. However, as a transfer student, he faces constraints such as work and a long commute. He also has a child that requires his time and energy as well. Yet, he is still expected to participate fully in Black student life at UCLA. When he is unable to attend events (as with the worker protest), his peers question him. Edon has to resist these expectations by reminding students of his responsibilities and his efforts to participate in activities when he can. He wants his Black peers to recognize his own challenges before they impose expectations on him that can be difficult to meet.

Similar to Edon, some Black students remain connected to the Black community on campus when they can (e.g. periodically attend events and group meetings) and maintain relationships with other Black students. They are a part of "the connected" on campus to some

degree but their responsibilities do not allow them to fully immerse themselves in the Black community. This is different from most student-athletes who occupy completely different spaces on campus and are institutionally segregated from other Black students.

However, other students' responsibilities are so great that they are not connected to the Black community on campus at all. They arrive at UCLA to attend classes and then leave without participating in any student groups, attending events or establishing relationships with other Black students. It is unclear as to whether these students want to be a part of the Black community on campus. However, some of "the constrained" students I interviewed appeared to not really know other Black students or have knowledge regarding student groups or events. They tended to be transfer students who lacked information about these groups and their schedules did not allow them much time to participate in them anyway. Moreover, Black student groups did not quite meet their needs. Adrienne discusses her concerns juggling multiple responsibilities:

So as a returning student, having kind of lived through different things, I had been much more focused on the academic programs...than kind of the black student effort and collective on campus especially because I'm not kind of the age demographic, the target audience...With me it's like, it was the figuring out which lab I'd like to do research in, and figuring out how to balance taking care of my little guy, and then figuring out how I could contribute in getting out of here, and going on to grad school.

Adrienne is an older transfer student who has numerous responsibilities including school, research, raising her son and making plans to go onto graduate school. She does not have time to participate in these groups due to all of her responsibilities. She also feels that they do not meet her needs. Some transfer students viewed these groups as social or as spaces specifically meant for traditional aged Black college students. Although there are organizations on campus that are geared towards retaining Black students, a few transfer students I interviewed pointed out that they felt these groups were not really working to help Black transfer students so they chose not

to participate in them. For example, some Black transfer students spoke of their desire to pursue post-graduate opportunities and wanted resources that they could use to move forward in their education. Yet, no one mentioned that they were receiving these resources from Black student organizations.

Similar to athletes, students like Adrienne and other Black transfer students also occupy a “lower status” authenticity. Their constraints, and the fact that campus groups (both institutional and student) did not meet their needs, place them on the periphery of the Black community at UCLA. Black transfer students (as well as traditional students who have family and work responsibilities) have particular needs that should be addressed by student organizations on campus. This will work to bring these students from the periphery of the Black community and move them more towards the center. It will help to give these students the support, resources and networks that they need to be successful at the university and beyond.

Barely Visible

There are other students who do not participate in Black student organizations, attend events and have few relationships with Black students. Some students feel isolated and alienated from the Black community on campus. Similar to many of the constrained students, they feel like Black student organizations simply do not meet their needs. However, unlike the constrained students, they do not really have any other responsibilities that keep them from participating. Their main issue is a lack of comfort around other Black students because they feel marginalized. I interviewed a few Black students who openly identified as LGBTQ² or identified as gay allies (it was not clear if these students also identified as gay) who spoke of feeling distant from the Black community on campus because they felt like LGBTQ issues were often ignored and

² LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer.

interactions and conversations were heteronormative and homophobic. The following excerpts exemplify the sentiments of these students,

“Well [during] admit week...we would do a collective circle and we would talk just about the African male experience on campus. It was all very heteronormative- there were conversations like what are the girls like and talking that type of lingo. So right off the bat, I really felt uncomfortable putting my sexuality out there, so I never did.”

-Jordan

“...The black community has a lot of issues with a lot of separate black communities within the larger group. What I mean by that is say, the black queer community for example; the larger black community won't associate with them. Why? Because, “Well, that's not normal or that's not....” They're getting all these stereotypes. First and foremost, they are still black, queer second or whatever they identify. You know what I mean? And it's just like they're students who are going to UCLA with maybe slightly a different experience than yours, they still need support from a community...”

-Bianca

Jordan and Bianca express how they feel towards the Black community on campus. When Jordan was admitted to UCLA, he participated in a recruitment weekend geared at Black students. He started participating in student group meetings for Black males but began to feel like he was not part of the group as the conversation turned heteronormative with his male peers discussing dating and girls. This worked to alienate Jordan from the group and made him uncomfortable to disclose his sexuality to the group. Jordan is now openly gay and maintains loose connections with Black student groups, although he is not fully immersed in Black student life. Jordan indicates not feeling completely comfortable in Black student organizations because of the marginalization of his sexuality. At the time of the interview, Jordan worked in multicultural and queer spaces on campus.

Bianca echoes a similar thought, pointing out that she feels the Black community on campus does not embrace Black LGBTQ students. These students are still constructed as different from other Black students and Bianca takes issue with how LGBTQ students are stereotyped and the lack of support they receive from the Black community on campus. This may

be a factor in deterring Bianca and other students from becoming involved in these groups. Although there is an organization for Black LGBTQ students at UCLA, there appears to be a need for these students to be better supported and integrated into the Black campus community, including other Black student groups.

There are other groups of students who felt alienated from the Black community on campus. These students did not feel comfortable around other Black students. This group was composed of students who have not been exposed to other Blacks growing up. In most cases, they were from predominately White neighborhoods; several were biracial (although not all) and had little contact with Blacks in their schools, activities and social surroundings. As a result of their lack of contact growing up, many of these students expressed discomfort being around groups of Black students and did not participate in Black student organizations or attend events. This discomfort stemmed from the idea that other Blacks would judge them and that they would not be “Black enough.” In fact, this group of students was more likely to believe that other Black students expected them to act stereotypically. Tyler explains the expectations he believes other Black students have of him,

Can you tell me about expectations Black students might have of you? Maybe the music. I’m in the jazz department. We sing standards, mainly, and so it’s not R&B or definitely not rap or hip hop. Maybe it’s just me who just thinks that they’re judging me, still, because I really haven’t had an instances here where I didn’t really act as black as people wanted me to. It’s just a comfort issue that I’m still working on.

Tyler invokes stereotypic assumptions of Blackness when discussing the expectations that he believes other students have of him. These assumptions include the idea that his musical interests should include R & B or rap/hip-hop. He later goes on in the interview to say that he feels that he might be expected to speak more slang, drawing upon another stereotype. However, Tyler also

recognizes that he may just *perceive* that other Black students are judging him rather than this actually being a reality.

Tyler has two Black parents and was raised in a predominately White neighborhood having very limited contact with other Blacks growing up. In high school, White students often told him that he was not “Black enough.” Based on these experiences, he came to believe that other Black students would also judge him even though he had never really encountered this situation. Due to his limited contact with other Black students, Tyler is not very comfortable around Blacks and invokes popular stereotypes as his perceived expectations. Like Tyler, some students in the “barely visible” group spoke of feeling particular expectations (usually involving stereotypes) without necessarily having these ideas communicated to them directly. Pre-college experiences, including limited contact with Blacks, integration with Whites and other non-Blacks as well as stereotypic media representations of Blacks may work to shape their perceptions of Black student expectations upon arriving at UCLA. Based on these experiences, students often felt like they did not fit a particular idea of Blackness. As a result, several of these students do not feel comfortable participating in Black student organizations, attend Black student events or develop Black social networks.

However, there are instances when Black students in the “barely visible” group directly encounter expectations from other Black students. These expectations can make these students uncomfortable because they often do not meet them. This works to create tension between these groups of students and further alienates those that are already “barely visible.” Ellen recalls her experience attending a Black student organization meeting,

Then another time we went we were talking about interracial dating and I told them that my boyfriend is Chinese and it was just kind of like before I said that in theory they said, oh, interracial dating is really nice...I mean, it was more under their breath, but it was

dead silence and then someone went, “Oh, Chinese” (*tone of shock/slight disgust*)... I was really upset...[They were] not very accepting of that at all, so I haven’t been back.

According to Ellen, when the subject of interracial dating arose, and she revealed that she had a Chinese boyfriend, the entire room went silent. Then, someone murmured “Oh Chinese” almost in disgust and she quickly realized that her relationship was not accepted in that space. Although students in the group appeared to be accepting of interracial relationships, they actually expressed their criticism of Ellen’s relationship. The students conveyed to Ellen that she was expected to have a Black boyfriend and that her having a romantic partner of a different race was not acceptable to them. This may be due to a history of Black out-marriage although this applies overwhelmingly to Black men, not Black women.

This group was comprised of all Black women. Ellen is a biracial student (Black and Latina) that may make her particularly open to having an interracial relationship to begin with. She was raised in a predominately White/Asian neighborhood and had limited contact with Blacks growing up. As a result, she did not really feel comfortable around other Blacks. Her experience at this group meeting worked to further alienate her from participating in Black student organizations. Although Ellen told me that she has become more comfortable with her Black identity (some experiences with Blacks outside the university worked to facilitate this), she remains troubled by the lack of acceptance she experienced in that particular group. When those students who are “barely visible” have experiences where their views or experiences are not welcomed within Black student spaces, they may be even less likely to participate within them.

Because these students do not participate in Black student organizations and tend to be the least comfortable around other Blacks, they are marked as the “barely visible” and subsequently, the least racially authentic. Although most students would acknowledge that these

students are Black (that is, they possess the physical traits and phenotypes associated with being Black), they are not really a part of the Black community on campus. They are seen as being outside the community. If being connected to the Black campus community marks students as the most racially authentic, then not being involved at all situates these students as the least racially authentic.

Discussion

Similar to Mary Pattillo's (2007) notion of Blackness as a project, I find that Black students at UCLA construct and negotiate expectations of Black racial identity. There appear to be expectations that all Black students be connected to the on-campus Black community. These expectations of Black racial identity were expressed through participating in Black student organizations, attending Black student events, and maintaining Black social networks. Of course, students encounter many other expectations of Black racial identity involving everything from food, music, interests, to who you date. However, these particular expectations were some of the most salient in students' lives and thus the focus of this dissertation chapter.

Black students encountered these expectations, in subtle and more overt ways, from other Black students. For example, some students described "feeling" like this is what they were expected to do. Many students described being asked to attend Black student meetings and events and if they did not attend, they were questioned about their whereabouts. This "racial policing" signaled to Black students that there were these expectations and that they should meet them. Expectations about how Black identity should be expressed relates to racial identity as performance (Jackson, 2001). Black students express or perform their racial identity through participating in Black student organizations, attending Black student events or maintaining Black social networks. The policing of these performances (e.g. if a student attends Black student

organizations and meetings or does not) are used to ascertain one's Black racial identity and membership within the on-campus Black community.

Dawson's (1994) theory of linked fate is also imbedded within these expectations. Black students are expected to participate in Black student organizations, attend Black student events, and have Black social networks as a means of giving back to the larger Black community off campus. These organizations work to provide services, such as tutoring, college prep and healthcare, for Black communities in Los Angeles. Black student events and social networks work to maintain cohesion within the Black community on-campus and to help recruit more Black students to apply to and enroll at UCLA. All of these expectations of Black racial identity involve giving back to the Black community in some form. As Dawson's (1994) theory suggests, students feel compelled to engage in this type of work because they feel a sense of responsibility towards the larger Black community. I found that one of the main reasons why Black students participate in these spaces is because they feel responsible for giving back to the Black community.

Another reason that Black students join Black student organizations, attend Black student events, and have Black social networks is to build and maintain strong community on campus. This demonstrates the significance of Black student counter-spaces in the lives of many Black students. Counterspaces are academic and social spaces, free from racial microaggressions, where students can come together (Torres and Charles, 2004; Willie, 2003; Solorzano, 2000; Gossett et al. 1998). These spaces allow Black students the opportunity to create community on campus. In addition, these spaces act as sites for expressions of Black racial identity. Many students feel that part of what it means to be a Black student at UCLA is to participate in Black

student organizations and attend events. My dissertation work adds to the literature on counterspaces by demonstrating how Black students use them to express Black racial identity.

Moreover, this research demonstrates the role of context in influencing expectations of Black racial identity. Racial identity has been examined in various contexts (Lacy, 2007; Butterfield, 2004; Warikoo, 2004) but few studies have focused on racial identity within higher education (Willie, 2003). My dissertation adds to this line of research by examining expectations of Black racial identity at a large, highly selective, public research university. In addition, prior research on Black racial identity in higher education has focused on identity at the individual level, paying little attention to context. My work fills this gap by analyzing how context influences Black racial identity. Previous studies have also not focused on larger group expectations and expressions of Black racial identity nor provided a systematic analysis of how Black racial identity operates within the higher education context (Willie, 2003). My dissertation also fills these critical gaps.

More specifically, I find that the context of low numbers of Black students at UCLA creates rigid boundaries around Black racial identity. With so few Black students on campus, the rest of the Black student population shoulders the responsibility to bring more Black students to campus, help to aid in the retention of those already here and engage with communities outside of UCLA. If students deviate from these expectations, they are subsequently “policed” by their peers who are fearful that if they cannot garner enough Black student participation, these groups and their efforts will be unable to continue. Moreover, the admission of Black students has been highly contested, especially within the last few years. These issues may work to further create these rigid boundaries, pushing Black students to feel as though they must engage in this work and advocate for other Black students.

This burden of responsibility that is placed on Black students is a form of cultural taxation (Joseph and Hirshfield, 2011; Padilla 1994). Many Black students are overburdened with their roles in Black student organizations and involvement in community work. Even if there were more Black students on campus, a lack of university support appears to be a major issue. The students are doing a lot of the work that the university may be better positioned to undertake. If the university were able to engage in more outreach and access work, Black students would be relieved of some of this pressure. The rigid expectations that Black students encounter around participating in these groups create tension because it is difficult to balance both academic and activist responsibilities. Many students negotiate these expectations by sometimes saying no to activities at particular times or at other times leaving the groups altogether.

Because these groups and events are connected to Black racial identity, choosing not to participate is not easy. When they do so, students risk their “racial authenticity” being called into question (Hunter, 2005). Racial authenticity means acceptance and recognition as legitimate members of the group (Hunter, 2005). I extend the research on racial authenticity by showing how the membership in the larger Black collective on campus can be threatened for students if they do not meet particular expectations.

Other groups of students are also at risk of having their racial identity questioned. Black students who had few links to other Blacks growing up may be viewed as less racially authentic because they do not meet the rigid expectations of Black racial identity. They do not participate in Black student organizations, attend events or have Black social networks because they do not feel comfortable socializing with other Black students. Smith and Moore (2000) find that Black students who had few connections to other Blacks growing up felt less close to other Black

students on campus. I add to this line of research by showing how this lack of comfort around other Blacks can lead to challenges in being able to meet expectations of Black racial identity. I also find that some Black students who had few links to Blacks growing up actually utilize the college campus as a site to explore their Black racial identity. This demonstrates the different ways that the higher education context can be used as a site for Black racial identity expression and development.

There are other groups that lack comfort around the Black student community. LGBTQ students and allies feel that LGBTQ Black students are not readily accepted into the Black student community on campus. Black LGBTQ students may not feel as comfortable connecting with the Black on-campus community. This raises interesting questions about racial authenticity and whether Black LGBTQ students, because of their sexuality, are considered part of the Black community. Because these spaces may also be heteronormative, this can contribute to LGBTQ-identified students feeling alienated. I only interviewed one student who openly identified as LGBTQ but it is possible that other Black LGBTQ identified students may feel similarly. Future research should address how Black LGBTQ students in higher education negotiate expectations of Black racial identity in higher education.

In addition, I found that there are other groups of Black students that face challenges in meeting expectations of Black racial identity. Black student-athletes and students with work and family responsibilities are constrained from participating in Black student groups, attending Black student events, and keeping up with Black social networks on campus. These students' obligations allow them little time to participate in these spaces. Many try to negotiate these expectations of Black racial identity by participating or attending events when they can. Involved Black students sometimes do not understand why constrained students are less involved and they

subsequently question them about their whereabouts. They may be seen as “less racially authentic” as a result. Student-athletes and those students with work and family responsibilities are still expected by their Black peers to meet these expectations although it is more challenging for them to do so. This finding demonstrates the diversity in Black student experiences at the university. The experiences of student-athletes and those students who have work and family responsibilities are often neglected in the literature. My dissertation sheds light on how these groups negotiate expectations of Black racial identity on campus.

Chapter 4

“Beasting” the Battle Zone: Navigating Raced, Classed and Gendered Terrain in Higher Education

Numerous studies of Black undergraduate students have examined their racialized experiences at the university (Willie, 2003; Feagin et al. 1996; Allen, 1992). While this is important work, few studies have analyzed how race might intersect with other social locations such as gender or class to shape the experiences of Black students in higher education. Black men and women can encounter microaggressions that are specific to their race and gender. Historically, Black men and women have been constructed and stereotyped in society in different ways (Collins, 2005). For example, historic representations of “the threatening Black male” and “the pushy Black female” are still seen in society today, particularly in the media and popular culture (Collins, 2005). These constructions of Black men and women might manifest at the university setting in the form of microaggressions. These microaggressions can create different experiences for Black men and women on campus.

In addition, Black students can encounter microaggressions that are connected to racialized notions of class. Race is tied to class and greatly affects the life chances of various racial groups. However, racial constructions and representations in our society are often linked to rigid ideas about social class, wealth and poverty. Racial groups are labeled as either poor or wealthy; these dichotomies fail to account for the economic variation within groups. These ideas about race and class may impact the types of microaggressions that Black students experience on campus. Race and class can play a role in how non-Black students and faculty perceive and subsequently treat Black students.

This chapter focuses on how Black students experience microaggressions that are connected to notions of race, class and gender. I argue that racial microaggressions are a form of boundary-making; a way in which non-Black students erect clear divisions between themselves and Black students. In this chapter, I start by analyzing the racial microaggressions that are experienced by Black students, regardless of their gender and class background. Black students encountered racial microaggressions including doubts about their intelligence, admission to the university and they were often targeted as “troublemakers” on campus.

Next, I focus on race and class, examining how these two social locations intersect to shape the experiences of Black students. I find that regardless of class background, Black students tend to be stereotyped as low-income and from poor neighborhoods. Then, I analyze the microaggressions that Black women and men experience, demonstrating the connection between race and gender. Black women and men encounter microaggressions of being exoticized, hypersexuality and aggressiveness but there were gender differences in how they experienced these microaggressions. Finally, I end the chapter with discussing student responses and resistance to raced, classed and gendered microaggressions. I find that Black students utilize equalization strategies (Lamont and Fleming, 2005) such as “beasting” (collective debates in class), “being the best,” serving as educators, silence and humor to respond and resist racial microaggressions on campus.

Literature Review

Due to the gains made during the Civil Rights Movement, many Blacks started entering predominantly white colleges and universities in larger numbers at the end of the 1960’s (Peterson et al. 1978). Racism was a rampant force on many campuses. Black students encountered racial isolation and segregation (Thomas et al. 1981; Allen, 1981). With regards to

faculty, students felt that instructors were not interested in them, did not give encouragement, used unfair grading practices (Fleming, 1984) and reported unfavorable relations with them overall (Allen, 1992). Moreover, the feelings of alienation, tension, institutional abandonment, bias in the classroom and lack of integration helped to foster a hostile interpersonal climate (Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1992). These aspects of campus life that were experienced so negatively by Black students worked to suppress their academic performance (Allen, 1981).

On today's historically White college campuses, racial discrimination continues to be a persistent thread in student experiences. These subtle racialized insults that Black students encounter on campus as well as the ways they are treated differently from Whites are known as racial microaggressions (Smith et al. 2007; Solorzano et al. 2000). Microaggressions affect the academic and social life of Black students and other groups of color on historically white campuses (Yosso et al. 2004; Solorzano et al. 2000; Solorzano, 1998). The racial microaggressions that Black students encounter include being excluded from study groups, policed in particular areas of campus and having to be the representative of their race (Smith et al. 2007; Solorzano et al. 2000). One pervasive racial microaggression is the assumption that Black students gained admission due to affirmative action policies (Yosso et al. 2004; Solorzano et al. 2000). Imbedded in this microaggression is the idea that Black students have not earned their place or deserve to be at the institution. Racial microaggressions can also include nonverbal communication (e.g. stares, avoidance), racial jokes, derogatory language and being singled out as exceptions to the racial group (Sue et al. 2009; Solorzano, 1998). These studies reveal the racialized nature of microaggressions but few analyze how other social locations such as gender, might intersect with race in these microaggressions.

Two recent projects have begun to shed light on race and gender microaggressions. Sue et al. (2007) found that Asian American women were often exoticized by White men that is indicative of the ways in which race and gender intersect to affect experiences; although they did not systematically examine race and gender. In one of the few studies to examine race and gender microaggressions, Solorzano (1998) found that female Chicana students often face harassment, sexual jokes and are not taken seriously by faculty and peers in their departments. While this body of work provides some gender analysis, it does not provide a more detailed examination of microaggressions that are connected to both race and gender. Moreover, this body of work focuses only on women's experiences and does not delve into how Chicano men experience microaggressions. Studies analyzing the experiences of both men and women are needed to capture how race and gender shape the lives of students on campus.

Few studies have focused specifically on Black students and how race and gender impacts their experiences. One such study by Smith et al. (2007) analyzed the race and gendered microaggressions that Black male students encounter on college campuses. Based on their race and gender, Black men faced marginalization and constant surveillance by police and authorities (Smith et al., 2007). For example, Black men often encountered stereotypes on campus of criminality and violence. As a result, they faced extreme policing on campus from law enforcement officials (Smith et. al, 2007). Other studies have also alluded to the hyper-surveillance of Black men on campus (Solorzano et al. 2002; Solorzano et al. 2000). Smith et al. (2007) use the term Black misandry to describe "an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional and individual ideologies and practices" (Smith et al. 2007, p. 558). Black misandry can be found in representations of Black

men that historically have been that of promiscuous and violent beings with images of the buck, brute and rapist being commonplace in society (Collins, 2005).

As a result of these representations, young Black boys are often “adultified” in school (Ferguson, 2000). They are punished as adults for behavior that is often accepted from their White male peers (Ferguson, 2000). This treatment continues into high school where Black young men are placed under constant surveillance (Lopez, 2004). These racialized and gendered images of Black men then influence the way their actions and behavior are policed in college (Smith et al. 2007). In my study, it is likely that Black male students experienced this kind of surveillance and policing. Given the historic representations of Black men, Black male students may have experienced other types of microaggressions as well. For example, given representations of Black male physicality and promiscuity, Black male students may also encounter stereotypes that they are athletes and/or sexual threats. My work uncovers the different microaggressions that Black men encounter.

Moreover, few studies have brought to light the types of microaggressions that Black women experience at the university. Black women have been historically characterized as the “bitch” and defined as aggressive, loud, rude and pushy and that of being sexually promiscuous (Collins, 2005). These images may influence how Black women are perceived and treated within the university context. I conduct a systematic analysis of the experiences of Black men and women in order to capture the variety of microaggressions that they encounter.

In addition to gender, there may also be other social locations that intersect with race in microaggressions. For example, race and class have been shown to collectively influence the experiences of Blacks from the neighborhoods people live in to the resources that they have access to (Lacy, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Moreover, there are racialized assumptions about

Blacks that are class based. Blacks are often stereotyped to be poor even when they are middle class (Collins, 2005; Feagin and Sikes, 1995). Black students pursuing higher education may experience these types of racial microaggressions. Yet, few studies have examined how microaggressions at the university can be both raced and classed. My dissertation documents the race and class based nature of microaggressions that Black students encounter at the university.

Moreover, the campus context has undergone major shifts in recent years. Economic downturns leading to decreases in financial aid and rising conservative backlash leading to the outlawing of affirmative action in many states over the years took a toll on the education of Black undergraduate students (Yosso et al. 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Carroll et al. 2000; Solorzano et al. 2000). Given all of the issues that continue to affect Black students on predominantly white campuses today, scholars have recognized the importance of having a critical mass of Black students, faculty and staff (Yosso et al. 2004; Solorzano et al. 2002; Carroll et al., 2000). A lack of a critical mass at the university can contribute to the creation of a hostile campus climate where racial microaggressions are rampant (Solórzano et al. 2000).

In recent years, the eradication of affirmative action in many states has drastically shrunk the numbers of people of color at many universities (Yosso et al. 2004; Carroll et al. 2000). This not only depletes racial and ethnic diversity which affects the entire campus but also leaves Black and other students of color more vulnerable targets of racial microaggressions (Yosso et al. 2004; Solorzano et al. 2002; Carroll et al. 2000). Black students not only face a campus climate that has traditionally been hostile to their presence but now encounter a space in which they are often fewer in number and subject to further alienation and isolation. Conservative backlash against affirmative action has led to greater contestation by white students, staff and faculty over the place of Black students on these campuses as well (Yosso et al. 2004).

The concept of equalization strategies may help us understand how Black students respond to these racial microaggressions (Lamont and Fleming, 2005). Equalization strategies have been used by professional Blacks to cope with racism (Lamont and Fleming, 2005). In these acts of antiracism, professional Blacks have used such strategies as asserting their intelligence, competence and education in order to challenge racism (Lamont and Fleming, 2005). Few scholars have examined how Blacks have responded to racism (Lamont and Fleming, 2005). My work aims to fill this gap by analyzing how Black students contest racism on campus.

In addition, Lamont and Fleming's study (2005) is particularly significant because it examines how Blacks deal with racism at the micro-level through everyday practice. Similarly, my dissertation work captures how Black students at the university resist racism in their daily lives. Because of the educational context, Black students may also draw on their intelligence and educational accomplishments to combat the racial microaggressions that they experience on campus. My dissertation also adds further insight into the concept of equalization strategies by identifying other ways Black students might subvert racism on campus.

In the following section, I document the racial microaggressions that Black students experience at the university. I start by discussing the most common racial microaggressions experienced by both women and men. Then, I demonstrate how some of the racial microaggressions that Black students experience are also gendered or classed. Finally, I highlight the strategies used by students to resist racial microaggressions.

Racial Microaggressions

"You don't deserve to be here:" College as Racialized Terrain

With college admissions becoming increasingly more competitive, the fight to gain a spot in the freshman class has become a major issue at many highly selective institutions such as

UCLA. Many public institutions such as UCLA have also been impacted by severe budget cuts within the last few years heightening this competition even further. College has become a highly contested site where questions of admissions, merit and who really “deserves” to be there are debated. Not surprisingly, these types of debates become racialized when the admission of Black and other students of color are called into question.

One of the most prevalent racial microaggressions that Black students experienced at UCLA was that they did not deserve to be there because they were educationally inferior to other students. The microaggression of educational inferiority has historically been an issue that Black students have been confronted with in higher education. However, I would argue that Black students experience a particularly heightened form of attack on their intellectual abilities because many colleges have become increasingly more competitive in the admissions process. Because Black students are stereotyped as intellectually inferior and some have gained admission to highly selective institutions, they instantly become the scapegoat in these debates over admissions and merit. Assumptions are made that they are unqualified to be there, especially given that these are highly selective institutions. Even the recent affirmative action court cases involving higher education have focused on admission to highly selective institutions. Therefore, the issues of who “deserves” to be a student at the university becomes a highly contested and racialized issue, focusing on the merit (or perceived lack thereof) of Black and other students of color.

In the case of UCLA, these questions of merit have become an issue spotlighted in the media. In 2007, a UCLA professor charged that the university had admitted “unqualified” Black students after the admissions policy was changed. This admissions controversy was reported by the LA Times and received considerable media and university attention. Not only has this UCLA

professor attacked the admission of Black students, but university students have also challenged the admission of Black students in similar ways. However, rather than be overt, these challenges tend to be much more subtle in nature. Kelly recalls what her experience on campus was like when she first arrived,

So by this point, I'm already knowing that I'm out of place, where people don't think I deserve to be here, because its been said to me. *Did people say that to your face, "you don't deserve to be here?"* Yeah. They wouldn't say it as far as it being their opinion. They'd relate it more to, "I have friends that think that the Black students that got in are just here to meet numbers, not that they really deserve to get in. And they think just because they have a 4.3 and a 2,800 on the SAT's that just makes them more qualified.

In this excerpt, Kelly receives the message that she does not deserve to be at UCLA, that she is educationally inferior. However, this message is conveyed in a covert way: through students relaying that their friends feel this way rather than claiming that this is their own view. Kelly believes that these views are actually those of the students but they use their friends to cover up how they really feel. Kelly has also heard these comments from multiple students, not just one person. This sends her the message that there is a general sentiment by many students that Blacks do not deserve to be at UCLA and that some of the people making these comments may actually share this same belief. These comments that Kelly has encountered demonstrate racialized beliefs about merit and educational ability. Black students are automatically perceived as undeserving and not as intelligent as other racial groups. These comments also reflect myths about affirmative action and quotas even though the United States Supreme Court outlawed quotas in the 1970's and affirmative action has been outlawed by the state of California since the mid 1990's.

Yet, Kelly also resists these beliefs by challenging student's ideas about merit. She questions why students believe that they have a right to be at UCLA simply because they have

high GPA's and SAT scores. As Kelly points out, GPA's can be dramatically inflated. In addition, the SAT exam has been shown to be culturally biased and favors upper middle-class and wealthy students as evidenced by the numerous SAT preparation classes that cost hundreds and thousands of dollars. Kelly's challenge to these ideas about merit allow her the opportunity to assert her rightful place at the university in spite of these student's sentiments.

Less Intelligent

Inherent in the idea of Black students not deserving to be at the university is that of their perceived educational and intellectual inferiority. In many of the interviews, students spoke about their awareness of the perception that they were not as intelligent as other students and therefore, did not deserve to be there. Often, Black students had interactions with other non-Black students that signaled to them that students thought of them as less capable and less intelligent. This microaggression was encountered by both Black men and women and was expressed in subtle and more overt ways. Aaron recalls a conversation he had with a student in his class,

There's a White male who told me one day, "I don't want you to get offended. Well, you know how they said in the slave days, they'd breed slaves. Like a bigger slave girl, a bigger slave guy. They'd put them together and make some strong slave kids... Well, so that's why all of the athletes are Black." He said the smart ones didn't get caught, and that's why if you notice here, there's a lot of Nigerians and Africans, they're doing good in school... Maybe that's why all of the athletes are Black here and there's not a whole bunch of academically motivated Black people because they're still over there.

This statement greatly offended Aaron as it implies notions of African American intellectual inferiority. It also pits native Africans against African Americans, situating one as more intelligent and the other as more athletically inclined. This student also utilizes a painful historical moment for African Americans to justify his perception that they are not as intelligent as other groups. This microaggression devalues Black students and the intellectual contributions

that they make to the university. Aaron is also a Black student-athlete on campus so this statement completely erases his intellectual capabilities and solely values his athleticism that is perceived to have a biological connection. This student actually draws on the same racial rationales that were used in the eugenics movement in the early 20th century. Aaron's experience is one of the more overt ways that the microaggression of educational and intellectual inferiority was conveyed to Black students.

Lack of collegiality

Another way that this microaggression takes place is in classroom interaction. Several students spoke about a subtle exclusion that takes place in class when students have to pair up or get together for group assignments or tried to form study groups. Many students talked about being the last person to find a group when they needed to complete a group project or that they had a hard time securing a study group. Shannon describes her experience in a group project,

This happened in my class last winter quarter. There was this Asian girl, she typed really fast and I would write the notes and I would want to meet up with her or at least exchange notes or study together because clearly she had things that I didn't have and we could combine and make a study group. People would show up to the study group and she would not come. We had midterms and I ended up getting a high score, like a 97 or something like that. Right when I got my test she asked me what I got...I said I got a 97. After that, for the final, she was willing to study with me.

In this case, Shannon has to prove her intellectual ability in order to get a fellow student to study with her. As a Black student, Shannon's intelligence and educational preparedness is doubted by some of her non-Black peers. They steer away from her during group assignments and study groups until they are convinced that she is as intelligent as they are. This exclusion affects the types of resources and networks Black students can access. It places a heavy burden on Black students, as some may feel like they have to prove themselves in order to fulfill the educational obligations they have (e.g. group projects) or gain the educational resources they need such (e.g.

study groups). Shannon claimed that this type of exclusion and doubting of her intellectual abilities occurred several times throughout her years at UCLA. Many students also spoke of similar occurrences, particularly in-group work, claiming that their participation in these spaces tended to be dismissed by other group members.

Moreover, this exclusion and perceptions of educational inferiority were encountered from not just White students but East Asian and Middle Eastern students as well. This could be due to a combination of class and racial interaction as many of these students are from middle and upper middle class backgrounds and have had little contact with Blacks in their neighborhoods.

Shocked by ability

Finally, a third way that Black students experience the racial microaggression of educational and intellectual inferiority is through surprise. Several Black students spoke about other students being shocked when they made an intelligent contribution or were knowledgeable about particular subjects. The fact that many students were shocked by their intelligence led many Black students to believe that these students doubted their own intellectual abilities from the start. Much like Shannon who received a high score on her exam, surprising other students in this way worked to challenge notions of Black educational inferiority but simultaneously worked to alienate Black students. The shock on other student's faces reminded them that they were perceived as less than just because of their race. Malik recalls his experience when he arrived on campus,

When you get here, there's all these backhanded comments. If I talked in class, some people were like, "Wow! You're really smart." I like being called smart but at the same time, it's like if I was White would you be saying that? Because there's White kids saying the same things that I am and nobody is walking up to them and telling them that they're smart. And just the way people look at you when you start to speak like I'm speaking. I'm articulate, I know what I'm talking about sometimes and they look at you

in awe. And in a sense, I like being respected but in another sense you can break it down and know why they're looking at you in awe because there's something that they've never seen and they didn't expect it...Like being put in this box that you have to be this and this way, and then if you're not, you're some kind of circus sideshow or something like that.

Malik recognizes that he is singled out for his intellect in ways that White students are not. On the surface, when a person is called smart, this is typically taken as a compliment. But in this case, the comment becomes racialized. As Malik put it, it is a "backhanded comment" because it is rooted in the idea that Black students are not as intelligent as other students. Therefore, some non-Black students display their shock and awe when students like Malik make intelligent contributions in the classroom. This surprise is sometimes expressed just because of speech; if Black students speak what is viewed as "standard" English, then they are seen as exceptionally articulate. Inherent in this idea of surprise is also that Black students are singled out for being the exception to their race; because they are intelligent and articulate, they are different from other Black people. This demonstrates racialized notions of Black inferiority and places these students on display for others as the exception, or as Malik put it, a kind of "circus sideshow."

Racial Targets in Classrooms

In addition to Black students being singled out for their intelligence in a racialized way, they are also targeted on campus in other ways. Several Black students reported that they were particularly targeted as disruptive, causing disturbances or blamed if any problems occurred during cross-racial interactions. Rather than being given the benefit of the doubt, these students were automatically assumed to be guilty of any infraction because they are Black. This targeting led to some highly charged racial incidents on campus. One in particular involved Dierdra and her friends as they were in a study lounge in the residence halls preparing for a midterm,

And I had another encounter last quarter that was blatantly racist. Me and some other people were studying in one of the Rieber lounges. Some girls had already been in there

and so when we came in, we were trying to study, and they got really loud, so we asked if they could be quiet. They left and then two RA's came back and basically were harassing us... They just kept trying to say you don't live here [Rieber] so you have to get out. And I kept saying, in this handbook of yours, where are these rules? If you can show me this, then I'll gladly get up, but if you don't have the proof to back it, then we're pretty much going to stay here. They ended up bringing [a campus police person] in, trying to escort us out. Then they came up with this supposed amendment from nowhere. "Well you guys can be in here if you have someone in here who lives here." We brought in one of our friends but then the initial people [who left] came back and they were blatantly loud. They came in with their laptop open, playing music really loud, then they just sat there and were talking. *So you think that they complained to the RA about you guys?* Yeah, because the RA said that people felt intimidated to go into the lounge.

In this situation, Dierdra and her friends were blatantly targeted as disruptive troublemakers even though they were using the lounge quietly studying for their midterm. In fact, the other students (who were White) were the ones who were disruptive yet they are viewed as the victims in this scenario. These White students invoke a common racial stereotype, that of Blacks being intimidating, to sanction Dierdra and her friends. Institutional representatives such as the RA's and the campus police support the White students and villainize Dierdra and her friends. They even attempt to apply some sort of residence hall rules as a justification for their sanctioning and in the end, do not enforce them which implies that they may have been simply using excuses to remove Dierdra and her friends from the lounge. This shows how White students and institutional members can collaborate to oppress Black and other students of color.

Dierdra and her friends immediately identify that this a racially motivated incident and attempt to resist being forced out of the lounge. In the interview, Dierdra says that when they actually call the situation a racial one, one of the RA's (who is Indian) says to her "Please don't bring up the Black thing again." Even though the incident appears to be racially motivated, none of the institutional representatives wants to deal with it as such. Although Dierdra and her friends stand their ground and wind up staying in the lounge, their presence is completely disregarded

and disrespected as the same White students claim that space as their own through playing loud music and talking amongst each other. By engaging in this behavior, White students assert their own privilege and entitlement and make the situation so unbearable that Dierdra and her friends ultimately wind up leaving the lounge. These White students were clearly targeting Dierdra and her friends and when they could not use their privilege to forcefully remove them from the lounge, they decided to exercise their privilege in a passive aggressive way to do so.

Black students were also targeted within classroom discussions and interactions. Several respondents talked about the negative ways Blacks have been depicted by their professors and fellow students. Professors and students made comments about Blacks that invoked popular stereotypes such as that of Black criminality and poverty. Some of the Black students I interviewed vividly remembered racial comments made by professors in class,

Oh man, the weirdest thing is taking education classes. I don't know if I was expecting her to say something, and I was just going to be like, "I can't believe you just said that." But she definitely, the way her statistics were and her interpretation of things, it was kind of like, "Did you just say that?" Black people don't value education as much as other cultures. What? Cultural deficit? So I would say it's been pretty hard for us at times to see eye to eye in education classes...for the most part, my education classes mess up on certain things.

Christian recognizes the culturally deficit way that his professor spoke about Black people. He utilizes a third eye (Feagin and Sikes, 1994) to make sure that he is actually interpreting the situation correctly. The third eye involves taking a "long look" at situations to see if they are racialized in nature before jumping to conclusions. Christian draws on this third eye to really make sure that the comments his professor is making in class are racially biased. After this "long look," Christian asserts that his professor has made remarks in class that reflect racial stereotypes, implying that Black people are somehow culturally deficient and do not value education.

He also raises the point that this is a common occurrence. Many of Christian's education courses target Black people in this way, claiming that they are culturally deficit. This racialized targeting in the classroom is a cumulative experience, happening in several classes over time for Black students. In addition, the racialization of Blacks in classroom discourse is difficult for students to encounter, particularly when it comes from professors because they are the authority figure in the classroom. When professors espouse racial stereotypes, it works to legitimize what other students may already be thinking.

Racial Jokes in Social Settings

Another type of targeting that Black students experienced is that of racial jokes. Black students sometimes encountered very harsh joking from non-Black students that reflected racial stereotypes. While these comments were supposedly relayed in jest, Black students saw that these jokes may actually believe these kinds of stereotypes. Often, these jokes were quite hurtful and worked to alienate Black students. Scott describes his experience with racial jokes in his residence hall,

Last year, we had a bunch of ignorance on our floor, so there were racial jokes going around about everyone. That was the group of guys that were on my floor, just in terms of White guys, there were a lot of racial jokes about stealing and stuff, and being good at basketball. I was the only Black person on the floor, so I didn't have this support system, like that's racist, it's not okay. If there was something about singing, they'd be like, "Oh well, we all know you can sing..." If I did badly on a test or something, they'd make a snide comment about it like "Duh." They'd make slavery jokes. They got really out there sometimes and they were almost always outlandish and it just got to the point where I didn't want to take it anymore. It got to the point where I didn't feel part of my floor community and I got really depressed about it in spring quarter. Definitely got a .9 GPA, it brought my GPA down way low because I didn't feel supported on my floor.

Scott had to endure a ruthless litany of racial jokes from White residents who lived on his dorm floor. Although he maintains that racial jokes were being said about everyone, as the only Black person on the floor, Scott was singled out and made fun of by a group of White men. These jokes

invoked racial stereotypes of Black criminality and intellectual inferiority. They also poked fun at the painful history of slavery and made certain cultural assumptions as well. These jokes alienated Scott from other students in his residence hall and contributed to his obtaining low grades that year. Like Scott, racial jokes and other forms of microaggressions can affect student's sense of belonging on campus and their academic performance.

Eventually, Scott approached these men about their racial joking and they stopped. However, the damage to Scott's grades, belonging and self-esteem were already done. It is difficult to feel that you are respected and a part of the campus community when you are the brunt of such hateful microaggressions, even if they are said in jest. In this case, humor is used as a cover for the diffusion of racial stereotypes.

Some racial jokes can be visual and symbolic representations as well. This is a way of communicating racial stereotypes without having to speak the words. Halloween and costume parties are typically sites for these kind of stereotypic representations. Shannon recalls an incident at a fraternity party she attended,

We try to go into those parties- freshman year we went into one and a kid had painted himself Black, literally the color Black, had a throwback jersey on and an afro and one of those fake chains and I couldn't believe it. Folks were laughing and even some of the Black people weren't upset. I didn't understand how you could not be upset about that. I said something to him and I got scolded by one of my Black friends for saying something, like just let it go. I was like, "Do you understand?" [He said] "Oh this is a costume. He was drunk. It comes off." I couldn't believe it.

Shannon is greatly offended by this student's physical representation of Black stereotypes. This student's painting himself Black touches on the painful past of blackface minstrelsy at the turn of the 20th century where Whites would paint their faces Black and mock Black people for entertainment purposes. The throwback jersey, Afro hairstyle and gold chain represent the "gangsta" stereotype that is often ascribed to Black men. In essence, this student is engaging in a

modern day form of blackface minstrelsy. Despite Shannon's protest, other students find this humorous, including some Black students. Shannon is even chastised by a fellow Black peer for challenging this representation. This could be due to the fact that these types of representations are so common in the media that some students, both White and Black, have become desensitized to them. It is seen as a laughable joke instead of the racist commentary that it is.

In addition, a similar incident such as the one Shannon described, happened in 2010 when a historically White fraternity at UC San Diego planned a party called "The Compton Cookout." This event, posted on Facebook, required students to dress up in stereotypical representations of Black people. While the event never actually took place, it drew a lot of media attention and created a huge controversy at the university and among the other UC campuses. Racial jokes can cause a great deal of harm towards not only individual students but they can also foster a hostile campus climate that threatens the entire university community.

Race and Class Microaggressions

Some Black students also experience assumptions about their class background. Blacks are often stereotyped to be poor. This stereotype ignores the rich socioeconomic diversity of Blacks as a group. In many cases, students encountered this stereotype regardless of their actual class background. Mikayla recalls an interaction she had with a classmate,

They think that I should come from a certain area in L.A. One of my classmates coming out of class, he kind of inferred that, if someone is in AAP or something, that they were from Watts or Compton. I was like, "Well, I'm in AAP. I'm from Santa Fe Springs." And he was like, "Oh, wow! Oh!" And then he just shut up.

AAP, the Academic Advancement Program, provides academic services and support for underserved students. It has gotten the reputation as being for Black and Latino students even though quite a few White and Asian students utilize these services as well. Mikayla's classmate implies that students of color in AAP must be from predominantly low-income, Black and Latino

neighborhoods such as Watts or Compton. When Mikayla asserts her social location as a Black student in AAP from a middle class area, the student (who happens to be Asian) is surprised.

From this interaction, Mikayla is made aware that others perceive that she is from a low-income neighborhood because she is Black and associated with particular programs on campus that support students of color. In the interview, Mikayla recognizes that many students at UCLA, like her classmate, are extremely sheltered and have had little interaction with Black and other students of color. Therefore, she takes on the role and burden of having to challenge these preconceived notions and educate her fellow students.

In addition, when Black students would tell other non-Black students or faculty where they were from, assumptions were often made about those neighborhoods. These assumptions were often rooted in racialized notions about class. Similar to Mikayla's experience above, Black students were thought to come from neighborhoods that were poor, under-resourced and "not as good" as the ones that middle and upper middle class White and Asian students attended. In Tiffany's interview, she told me she got the sense that White students felt like they were above her. When I asked why she said,

Well, just like the things they would say. I remember we were in class and we were just talking about neighborhoods and they were saying that their neighborhood's better than mine. I'm like, "You've never been to where I've been. Just because I'm from Pasadena, Altadena, you've never been there so you can't say that." Or just with the kind of car they drive, just like materialistic things. I told them, "You've never been to my house, so you don't know anything about me" and they got all freaked out. "I can't believe she said that." Like yeah, I said it, "how do you know that?" Nobody would answer that.

Here, we see the connection between race and class. Because Tiffany is Black, she is thought to come from a lower status neighborhood. Like most neighborhoods, there are low-income areas of Pasadena and Altadena but there are also middle class areas as well. Yet, the possibility that Tiffany could come from a middle class area is completely erased. She is automatically assumed

to be poor. The reality is that Tiffany is actually from a predominantly White middle class neighborhood. She attempts to resist this raced and classed microaggression by challenging her classmate's preconceived notions. Even though her White classmates appear to be taken aback by her challenging them, Tiffany asserts her position so as not to let them get away with stereotypical remarks that disparage her community. When Black students were faced with these types of raced and classed assumptions, they often resisted in this way.

Race and Gender Microaggressions

Exoticized: Cultural Carriers vs. Athletes

Non-Black students frequently exoticized non-Black students based on their race and gender. This exoticizing of Black students is due in part, to a lack of contact with Blacks. Many non-Black students at UCLA—Whites, East Asians and Middle Easterners—live in neighborhoods, attend schools and participate in activities with few Black people. As a result, they have had little contact with Blacks growing up. Because of this lack of interaction, these students perceived Black students as coming from an entirely different background than them. They are essentially “othered.”

This othering sometimes resulted in Black students being exoticized based on social locations such as their class background. For example, Black men and women from predominantly low-income areas would often encounter a barrage of questions about how dangerous their neighborhood was. Perceptions of these neighborhoods were often rooted in media stereotypes. Non-Black students appeared to be fascinated by these exotic media portrayals of “the hood” and looked to Black students from these areas to tell them stories about their neighborhood. Here, we see the strong connection between race and class and how Black students from low-income backgrounds are exoticized.

However, I found that the manner in which Black students were exoticized was strongly tied to their gender. Black men and women both encountered stereotypes where they were perceived as the “exotic other.” However, Black women and men experienced this exoticizing differently. Race and gender shape the ways in which non-Black students exoticize Black students on campus. In particular, Black women tended to be asked about certain cultural aspects such as hair, food and dance. Vanessa explains her interactions with non-Black students,

Just the whole, “You’re from Compton. Do you know the gangs? Do you know Snoop Dog? Have you ever seen anybody get shot? Just really curious about the whole- you’re coming from the ghetto, what’s that like? What was your experience like? I try not to take offense to things like that- but [they’ll] ask you questions about soul food, or “Do you braid your hair?” This one girl, she’s Asian, sent me a message on Facebook saying she cut her hair and she’s like, “I really want to get extensions. I know there’s some places on Crenshaw where you can go and get weaves. And I figured you would know.” I’m like, “Does she think I have a weave or does she think that all Black girls with long hair have weaves? What is this?” It was just like that, [it] was random.

Because of her gender, Vanessa is expected to know some of the “cultural markers” associated with Black women. Knowing how to braid hair and cooking soul food are some of the cultural stereotypes ascribed to Black women. This works to exoticize Black women; placing them in a different category of womanhood that marks them as “other.” Many of the questions that are asked of Black women draw on racialized and gendered assumptions as in Vanessa’s case where she is seen as the authority on hair extensions and wonders whether the student actually believes that “all Black girls with long hair wear weaves.” These assumptions are ways that non-Black students essentialize Black women. It also places a burden on Black women to have to educate non-Black students challenging their raced and gendered assumptions.

I found that Black women experienced more questioning from non-Black students about perceived aspects of Black culture than Black men. This could be due to the fact that women are often viewed as the ones responsible for maintaining cultural traditions in society. Therefore,

Black women are seen as the ones to answer questions about culture to teach non-Black students so that they can learn the latest dance moves or get hair extensions. In this way, Black women are exoticized and tokenized and assumed to engage in all of these practices and know about them even though they may not.

Moreover, Vanessa is from Compton, a predominantly low-income area that is often thought of in the public imagination as a dangerous, violent place to live. Non-Black students look to Vanessa to confirm these exoticized impressions of the area. Vanessa is unwillingly made the spokesperson for Compton just because she comes from that area. These student's impressions and questions bring forth an exaggerated portrayal of Compton. Many predominantly low-income areas like Compton have issues such as gang violence and drugs but often, these student's perceptions are exaggerated because they have never actually been there. Their exaggerated impressions work to exoticize Compton and "other" it even further.

While Black women were expected to have knowledge of such elements as music, food and hair, Black men were exoticized in a different way. Because of their gender, they were often assumed to be athletes on campus. For black men to be stereotyped as athletes implies they were accepted to UCLA for their athletic prowess rather than their intelligence. It completely denies their intellect and contributes to the preconceived notion that they do not truly deserve to be at UCLA because they did not "earn" their way there via their academic achievements. It connects to the stereotype mentioned earlier of intellectual inferiority.

However, this gendered microaggression of being perceived as an athlete is also a way that non-Black students exoticize Black men. The Black male body has long been objectified and commodified by larger society. For example, Black men are often depicted in the media as hyper masculine and overtly sexual (Collins, 2005). When Black men are perceived as athletes at

UCLA, they are also seen in this way. The interest in their perceived athleticism is rooted in notions of Black masculinity and sexuality. Non-Black women show interest in these men as sexual partners and non-Black men are fans of the perceived athleticism and physicality of the Black male body. Rahim describes his experience with White students at a party,

Well, there is a standard. Some of them expected me to play a sport and I've seen the difference between when they thought I played a sport and when they didn't. I was at a party and this one girl was like, "Oh, do you play football?" I'm like, "No, I run track." Mind you, I don't run track. I'm not an athlete. I just wanted to see what she would say. And she's like, "Oh, okay" [continues talking to him]. And then another girl came up to me, probably about thirty minutes later and was like, "Hey what sport do you play?" "Do you run track or do you play football?" I was like, "Oh, I don't play any sports." She's like, "Oh, okay." She disappeared in the blink of an eye.

In this situation, two White women at a party exoticize Rahim for his perceived athleticism.

They both appear to be interested in him because they believe he is an athlete. When he admits the truth to one of these women that he is not an athlete, she immediately loses interest in him.

Black athleticism is expected by non-Black students and celebrated by them. In my interviews with Black student-athletes on campus, they also discuss how non-Black women, especially

White women pursue them sexually, speaking to the stereotype of the Black man as

hypersexualized. Non-Black men are fans, fascinated with Black males' perceived physicality and aggressiveness. When non-Black men perceive Black men as athletes, they are objectifying the Black male body. The athlete microaggression is connected both to notions of intellectual inferiority and to the objectifying of the Black male body. In this way, Black men are exoticized due to their race and gender.

Hypersexuality: Promiscuous vs. Sexual Predator

Given that Black men's bodies tend to be sexualized in our society, Black men felt as though non-Blacks perceived them as sexual predators. Several Black men spoke of the long and painful history of Black men who were accused of exhibiting sexual behavior towards White

women. These perceived transgressions could range from flirting as in the Emmett Till case to accusations of rape. Many Black have been imprisoned and murdered over the years for simply being accused of these sexual transgressions. Because of this history, several Black men I interviewed talked about having to monitor their behavior in front of non-Black women, particularly White women. They monitored their behavior so as not to appear like they were sexually threatening. Brandon, a Black student-athlete explains his interactions with White women,

They can get you in trouble though. You get some liquor in you, you know stay away from that. *Why? Will they be forward towards you guys?* They'll try to do that. But you got to be careful who you talk to. I mean, anybody can lie and anybody will believe a woman. So I just stay away from all that. I got a friend on the team that something just happened to him like that. So I don't play around with that stuff.

Brandon describes the careful measures he takes to avoid engaging with White women. At UCLA, there is a popular belief that many Black student-athletes have sexual relationships with White and other non-Black women. I interviewed some male student-athletes who admitted that they had "hooked up" with White women. However, there were also men like Brandon who exercised caution in this regard. As Brandon infers, one of his teammates wound up in trouble for engaging in a situation like this one. Even though some students saw relationships between Black men and White women as being more accepted on the campus as opposed to Black women with White men, this usually referred to how the Black community reacted to such relationships. Some Black students perceived Whites as having a real problem with these types of relationships, particularly White men. Both Black male student-athletes and non-athletes remained guarded as a result. Rahim, a Black male student non-athlete shares his experiences with White students,

I don't talk with them unless they talk to me first because I feel I'm scared of all of them. As far as White women, I always have that fear, if I make a joke, I'm going to jail. Or if I

physically touch them a little bit too hard, I'm going to jail. I could say it's definitely been put in me to be scared of White women...And then White men, I don't know, [it's] kind of hard to trust them. Just because I feel they are scared that I'm going to go after their women...So that's been instilled in me for as long as I can remember. And so although I'll go up there and I might not have those intentions at all, I still feel like it's there.

Rahim describes the lingering fear that he has when he interacts with White students. He is concerned about legal sanctioning that speaks to the historical and continued policing of Black men in this regard. He is also concerned that White men may view him as a sexual threat. Even though Rahim states that these men might be "scared" of him going after White women, he appears to legitimately fear that White men may harm him if they perceive this to be the case. The assumed sexual predator is a microaggression that works in subtle ways. The men described feeling uncomfortable or being guarded in their interactions with White women. The historical memory of Black men being seen as sexual predators may be at work here as well as recent examples as Brandon recalled a friend of his who got in "trouble." In these examples, race and gender work to shape the experiences and interactions that Black men have on campus.

Black women also encountered a race/gender microaggression regarding their sexuality. While Black men were largely seen as sexual threats or predators, Black women were seen as promiscuous. This speaks to the historic perception of Black women as jezebels. In slavery, White slave owners frequently raped Black women because they were viewed as sexually free and seductive. Because they were perceived in this way, they were not seen as real women. Some of the Black women I interviewed encountered this type of microaggression. They were viewed as more sexually "loose" than White women. Katrina recalls an interracial relationship she had at UCLA,

Like I had been dating this one guy, who's in the Greek system, he was White. And I would walk past some of his buddies, and they'd be like, "Oh, Justin has jungle fever." And I really wasn't being any more promiscuous than any other girl. But they would

always try to call me out on it. Sometimes they'd be drunk and not realize that I can hear them. And I hear. And he would apologize for their actions but I was just like...I was pissed...That's all everyone ever sees or that's all they ever comment on...

The term "jungle fever" is a derogatory term that refers to Black/White couples and implies the sexual promiscuity of Black women and the sexual "conquering" of White men in these relationships. These comments work to "other" Katrina in her relationship with her White partner. These men instantly perceive of her relationship with a White man as strictly sexual rather than romantic. As a Black woman, she is seen as more overtly sexual and promiscuous than White women. She is reminded that some White students perceive her through a race/gender lens that works to degrade and alienate her.

This type of racial and gendered microaggression can also be expressed in an explicit and hostile manner. Shannon describes an incident that some of her Black female friends experienced on campus,

With the White frats this year, on this campus, I have had other racial experiences with them, especially this year. Some of my friends got called by the Beta House; they called two of my Black friends "nigger sluts" and threw bottles at them as they were walking by. We're still working on the school. We filed paperwork, called the police and tried to make it a hate crime and the police won't investigate it and won't deem it a hate crime. The school still has not disciplined the frat. The ASU (Afrikan Student Union) is working on that. The two girls have been filing letters...That is not the first time it happened. During FSP (Freshman Summer Program), the second week, we were walking up Landfair and some people in the apartment complex called us "n-words."

This situation exemplifies how notions of race and gender intersect in microaggressions. These women were denigrated for both their race and sex. The term that these women were called speaks to perceptions of Black female inferiority and promiscuity. The lack of attention given to this serious hate crime by the university and police is yet another microaggression committed against Shannon's friends and the larger Black student community. It sends the message that Black students are not valued members of the university community as White students are.

Moreover, Shannon points out that she has encountered similar situations such as this before. Black students need to feel protected at the university. Otherwise, their sense of belonging, mental well-being, academic performance and retention may all be in jeopardy.

Aggressiveness: Intimidating vs. Physically Threatening

A third race/gender microaggression that Black students experienced was that of being assumed to be aggressive. However, there were clear gender differences in the ways that Black women and men experienced this type of microaggression. For Black women, this microaggression of aggressiveness translated into their being viewed as intimidating. The perceptions of Black women as intimidating shaped their interactions with Whites and other non-Black students on campus. Kelly is a resident assistant (RA) in one of the residence halls on campus. She describes her experience with her boss in RA training,

It's just in the sense of going through training, before we even started in summer time, it's like being addressed about things that everyone else is doing, but you know it's pointed out to you because you're Black. So I've been at meetings and my boss would say, "You always are mad and you always look mad and you should smile." Mind you, it's 9:00 at night, 10:00 at night and we've been up since 8:00 and 7:00 in the morning. And everyone else is looking worse than me, so I have to be the one with the attitude. I have the attitude. I couldn't, no, I'm not tired, I just have an attitude. And it was like, "Smile." No, I'm not going to smile at 10:30 at night because no one else is smiling right now so why are you worried about it? So that was the beginning of it and then it just progressed...It's something you can expect. Just a big deal. Over my spring break I had a confrontation with my boss' boss because the reality of the situation was my boss had mentioned to me that I was intimidating.

Kelly is perceived as intimidating by her boss just because she is not smiling and does not exemplify the mood that her boss thinks is appropriate. She is essentially singled out in this regard; as she explains, the trainings were really long days and in the evening everyone was tired and had low-energy. Yet, Kelly is sanctioned for her behavior while her other staff members are not. One stereotype of Black women is that they have bad attitudes. As a Black female student, Kelly's boss views her in this way. As time goes on, this microaggression progresses even

further to Kelly's boss labeling her as "intimidating." This is another stereotype of Black women; that they are aggressive both verbally and in demeanor. Like Kelly, several Black women I interviewed spoke of encountering this microaggression of being seen as aggressive and intimidating.

One form of intimidation that is often applied to Black women is that of being loud and outspoken. Black female students faced expectations that they always speak their mind and "not take anything from anyone." They were often perceived and treated as having dominant personalities. However, these perceptions marginalized Black women in many interactions because all of their actions were viewed through this lens. No matter how benign and non-threatening the interaction, Black women were often automatically assumed to be the aggressor or expected to be. Nina is a resident assistant and describes her experiences with her fellow student staff members,

I'm expected to be the real one. I'm expected to be the feisty one... So for instance I had got into a verbal altercation... this is a girl nobody really likes and she had disrespected me and I told her "That's not cool. You don't disrespect me..." My staff members were like, "Oh, I heard someone bitched out so-and-so." And I was like, "Oh, that was me." And I think that when I told them that it was me, it was kind of like, "I knew it had to be you." Like of all people, it would be me, the Black RA. I would be the one to tell the one person that nobody ever tells [anything to], that would be me to cuss them out. And I didn't really cuss her out. I have that expectation to be real... The girl who witnessed it (confrontation) she was like, "Yeah, she was scared. You could tell she was really upset because if you guys got in a fight, I know you would whoop her ass." And I'm like, "Why do I have to whoop her ass?" Because I'm Black? It's like, I don't even know if I could fight. You understand?... That gets on my nerves.

Nina is aware that other non-Black students expect her to be aggressive, intimidating and outspoken. This is exhibited when her fellow staff members see her as "bitching out" the other person in a conversation. Nina also is perceived as having the ability to physically fight the other girl. In reality, Nina sees this incident as harmless. Nina felt that this woman had disrespected her and spoke to her about it. She did not curse at the girl or do anything threatening. Nina

appears to feel even more justified in approaching this woman because nobody liked her but nothing had been said to her. In effect, Nina was likely echoing some of the group's own feelings towards this woman when she spoke to her. However, because Nina is a Black woman, others view this conversation as an aggressive confrontation. She is expected and perceived to be loud and intimidating.

Similar to Black women, Black men encounter racial microaggressions that they are aggressive and intimidating however this takes on a different form. Whereas Black women tend to be stereotyped as aggressive in personality and on a verbal level, Black men tend to be stereotyped as more physically intimidating. As such, they are often viewed as threatening and criminalized as a result. Several Black men I interviewed had encountered this microaggression at some point throughout their lives and many continued to deal with this stereotype on a consistent basis. Gavin describes his experience,

...When people think of [Black males], it's just like thuggish, gangster type. In fact, I kind of had an incident with it yesterday...I wanted to move my car, so somebody parked in a spot that I was going to park in but they were still in their car so I was feeling like they might leave. So I walked up to their car, trying to tap on their window and she just had a frightened look on her face because I mean, I'm a Black man. And then she was real cautious rolling down the window. And I just asked her, "Were you parking or were you leaving?" You know, I thought nice. And she was like, "Oh, I think I'm going to park." Like her demeanor was just really, really scared. And then I walked back, I was like "She was just so scared." And my girlfriend's like, "Yeah, because you're Black."

Gavin's story serves as a prime example of the criminalization microaggression that Black men encounter. Gavin could tell from this woman's reaction that she was very scared of him and viewed him as a threat even though he did nothing to indicate that he would harm her. An everyday interaction that most people engage in such as asking another driver if they are leaving their parking spot suddenly takes on a negative connotation because of the stereotype that Black men are threatening. Gavin is also very cautious of his behavior in this situation as he asks the

woman “nicely” if she is leaving the parking space. He makes every effort to appear non-threatening in order to avoid this stereotype. Despite his efforts, the woman still remains afraid of him. This “othering” of Gavin is offensive and demeaning yet it is a common occurrence in the lives of many Black men. Black men in this study spoke about dealing with microaggressions such as this one as a part of what it means to be a Black man in society.

Because of this perception of criminalization, many Black men often found themselves “under surveillance.” Whether this took place at a clothing store or on campus, several men spoke of encounters where their behavior was either monitored or policed in some kind of way. This could mean being watched by others when walking in the street or being asked to show their I.D. by campus police. The racialized assumption behind this surveillance is that Black men are up to some type of wrong-doing and their actions require policing. Ricky shared with me a particularly memorable experience in this regard,

One time I was walking through DeNeve (campus residence hall). And he (campus security) didn't want to let me walk through but there was some White people going through after. And I was completely sober, going to my car. And they were drunk and making noise. And he didn't want to let me go through. And I was like, “You're letting them through. How come I can't go through?” And he was like, “They go here.” And I was like, “I go here too.” And after that, he shut up. And I was like, “It's crazy.” How they don't even think Black people go here.

As a Black male, Ricky is perceived by campus security as threatening and his behavior is closely monitored. In fact, campus security did not even believe that he was a UCLA student. Several Black men I spoke with mentioned that they would purposefully wear their UCLA sweatshirts and t-shirts on campus so that they would be marked as members of the campus community. They did this to avoid being stopped and subsequently harassed by campus police that many claimed happened often when they did not wear their university clothing. Ricky also points out the double standard in this situation in that White students were allowed to pass

through the dormitory without this same scrutiny. To make matters worse, these students were visibly intoxicated while Ricky was completely sober. Yet, they were assumed to be students while Ricky was not. Ricky is also very tall with a husky build that probably added further to the perception of him as threatening.

Although Ricky says, “they don’t believe Black people go here,” I would argue that there is a race/gender component to this statement. Black men are particularly targeted as physically threats and therefore, they fall out of the common perception of who a UCLA student is. While Black women face inequality on campus in other ways, many Black men in this study spoke about their role as a student being called into question by campus authorities, as something not to be believed. As the two examples have shown above, this microaggression works to criminalize Black men and shapes their experiences both on and off campus in very meaningful ways.

Student Resistance: Equalization Strategies

“Beasting”

Black students resisted racial microaggressions in several different ways. One of the main ways they resisted was to challenge racial stereotypes and assumptions. A few students referred to this as “beasting.” This idea of “beasting” took place within classroom debates and discussions. In the interview, Jada explained to me what “beasting” is. She describes it below:

So in lecture, we’re a strong front and then we’d have to attack it over there, like you know, don’t try to come at us like that...Last quarter, I had political science, African American Political Thought, so it was kind of a cluster of us. We all roll together. Study together. We have what they call “beasting.” Beasting is if you and I were to get into a debate and then you beasted me, that means you put out everything you have to say to me and I can’t say anything more. Like okay, you beasted me. I can’t say anything. So we have a lot of beasting in our classes. Especially like depending on who’s there. Like yeah, she just beasted her.

“Beasting” is when students form a collective and directly challenge other student’s offensive comments in class. Jada actually uses language reminiscent to that of war by saying that she and her Black peers are a “united front” and that they have to “attack” racial comments. In this way, Jada and her friends engage in an active form of resistance. The collective forms a powerful unit that challenges these racial microaggressions with their arsenal of knowledge and experience.

While not everyone had a term for this type of challenging, many students that I interviewed talked about engaging in this type of resistance. Some students spoke about challenging these racialized assumptions on an individual level by asserting their perspectives in class and debating other’s ideas. Carlos describes his experience in the classroom,

I’ve had feelings where they expected me to do something just kind of ignorant and not know stuff in class. If we had a discussion about something, a new topic, I kind of sense it. Because when you do speak about it, they all have that look like, “Oh, okay. He knows something. He’s smart...” It’s bad but you kind of get used to it. So you got to just make sure you do what you got to do and kind of show them up, like one-up them...I always put things in kind of a competition set of mind. If it’s a competition between the next person, let’s try to show them out.

Carlos described this classroom experience as a “competition” where he has to “try to show them out.” He makes sure he is prepared for class and actively participates, making sure his voice is heard. He is aware that non-Black students expect him to be less intelligent and less academically prepared than they are. Through asserting his presence in class, Carlos challenges the racial microaggression of intellectual inferiority that so many Black students experience on campus. Similar to Jada, he also uses war-like language to describe this act. In this case, the classroom becomes a battleground with Black students having to attack racial microaggressions to win the war.

“Being the best”

Related to the idea of “beasting” is the notion that Black men and women must “be the best” to counteract racial microaggressions. This means that in whatever institution they find themselves in and whatever goal they are pursuing, they must work hard and excel. The idea of “being the best” often extended into excelling above and beyond other’s expectations and doing better than non-Blacks. Because these young men and women were on a college campus, they often thought of “being the best” within the university context. They had to take challenging courses, get good grades in those courses and balance their academic and extracurricular activities well. Students talked about making sure that they were well prepared for classes and office hours. Monica describes all of the measures she takes in order to prepare for her courses,

I work double-hard...Even when I’m going to office hours, [it’s like] what is she really coming in here to say?...You can read the looks on people’s faces...You can see them tense up a bit...So when I go in there, I should be on my A-game because I know everything I’ve done is going to be questioned for it’s authenticity...So before I go to office hours, I’ve got to know what I’m talking about...Because I already feel I’m expected not to know anything. I’m expected not to come to class. In [group] projects, I feel like I’m looked at as a slacker automatically. I’m on it though, especially in the presentations because I don’t want that theory to be associated with me because I worked damn hard. It’s never really a day off. It’s always on top of your game, always making sure you’re one step ahead of the group...Even though someone turned in a paper that is grammatically incorrect, all throughout the paper it’s horrible, mine has to be on point and the answers have to line up.

Monica makes painstaking effort to excel in her courses so that she can challenge stereotypes.

She tries to avoid judgment by being hyper-meticulous about her work and her knowledge of the course material. Office hours are typically used by students to get their questions answered by teaching assistants and professors; students are not expected to have mastered the material.

However, as a Black student, Monica is aware of the way that others view her. Although much of this is unspoken, she reads people’s body language and looks; she knows they are reacting to her in a negative way. As a result, she feels as though she has to over-prepare for office hours, be

extra-sharp during group presentations and scrutinize her papers before submitting them in order to defy stereotypes of Black students as “unintelligent” and “unqualified to be at UCLA.”

Many of the Black students I interviewed spoke of taking part in these efforts in an attempt to resist racial microaggressions. However, these efforts can also place intense pressure on students to have to perform above and beyond all of their peers. It allows very little room to “fail” or even just struggle with challenging courses as many college students do. These microaggressions place an undue burden on Black students to challenge them. This burden and subsequent pressure can affect student’s academic and mental well-being.

Educator and Racial Representative

Another way that Black students resisted racial microaggressions is through taking on the role of educator and racial representative. Whenever the subject of Black people or issues related to them arose in class, many Black students felt that they should speak about it because there are so few of them at UCLA. They felt responsible for bringing their perspective to class. This sense of responsibility became heightened when offensive comments about Black people were made in class. Damon says,

In English class, I was the only Black person in there. We were reading Richard Wright. One White girl was like, “I don’t like this book. It’s all about a Black man trying to catch a break. What’s the big deal?” I had to give her a quick educational moment on why this is significant and you don’t see where Black people have come a long way? I wouldn’t be here right now. Just educate them. So that’s how I’ve developed my whole look on UCLA. Some people might get mad at them. But I see it as basically, if I was never in that room, she would have made her crazy comment and nobody would have said anything. I think my goal, my mission here is to educate these people on me. That’s pretty much what I do. You’re going to have to be the voice of the Black people. Stand up and represent the whole race. What does that mean? I know what that means. Stop, give her a little education moment, let her know how stupid she was and then move on. If I was never there, she would have said her little thing and it would have been done.

Damon sees it as his role to be the educator and racial representative when he is in class. He challenges this White woman's perspective because he feels like he has to. If Damon was not in the class, it is likely that no one would have challenged her comment. As the only Black student in the room, Damon takes on the responsibility of being "the Black voice" in the room and having to educate this woman and the rest of his classmates. Taking on the role of the educator and racial representative can be a form of active resistance against racial microaggressions. Black students have the power to bring a different perspective to the classroom and challenge racialized ideas and assumptions. They resist these deficit notions and attempt to transform this academic space in a more socially just way.

However, being the racial representative can also be a burden as well. When any issues related to Black people arose in class, non-Black students expected that they would talk about them. This was often conveyed in non-verbal forms such as looks and stares. This put the student on the spot to have to speak up even if they did not want to. Black students were essentially tokenized and practically forced to provide what non-Black students perceived as "the Black perspective." This tokenization made some students feel extremely uncomfortable. In his interview, Jordan told me that he has at times been the only Black male in the class. When I asked him what that felt like, he said

It still makes me mad, even to this day, especially when you start talking about issues of the Black race. One, it's uncomfortable, because then you actually have to realize it, "Why am I the only Black person here?" Then, I've been asked to speak for the Black community...I feel like it's always an uncomfortable issue...Back then, I would just always say, "I can speak to my experience which is probably different from someone else's." It was always just kind of more of an uncomfortable thing to have to do.

Being the only Black person in class, Jordan is reminded constantly of racial inequality and the struggle for Black student admission to UCLA. As a result of being the only Black person in

class, Jordan has actually been asked directly to speak on behalf of the Black community. He is positioned as the Black racial representative in the class that makes him uncomfortable. Even though he attempts to qualify his response by noting that there is diversity in perspectives, he still is tokenized in this setting. In Jordan's example, we see how the reality of low numbers of Black students on campus can place an undue burden on them to be the racial representative for the Black community.

Silence

Some Black students used silence as a way of resisting with racial microaggressions. They used silence strategically, choosing not to respond at particular times when they encountered racial stereotypes and expectations. For example, as I previously discussed, Black students were often expected to be the racial representative by non-Black students in class. It is assumed they will speak on any issues pertaining to the Black community. But, this expectation can be resisted. Jada explains how she uses silence in order to defy this expectation at particular times,

Today's lecture was about Ebonics and how in 1996, Oakland decided that we should develop it and we should make it into a real language. And it's kind of like, okay, look for the Black voice. Okay, so we're talking about Ebonics, we're talking about African Americans. It's not verbal, like Jada, you should say something. It's kind of like- "Does anybody feel...?" Like we're making eye contact. And I'm just kind of sitting there taking my notes, I'm not going to comment on this. Sometimes I don't on purpose because they expect me to and I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to feed into that unless they start saying something that's completely out of pocket. Then I will beast them.

Jada actually resists the racial representative microaggression by strategically choosing not to speak up in class. She knows that non-Black students expect her to be vocal on issues that pertain to the Black community but she actively decides not to engage in this conversation. Jada does not want to "feed" into this expectation. She is not the voice of all Black people and refuses to be

tokenized in this way. Jada chooses to speak up in class only if the comments made are racially offensive. She asserts her own power and controls whether or not she speaks in class; she does not allow racial expectations to dictate her behavior.

A few students in the interviews talked about using silence in various ways. Some students felt that they did not want to dignify certain racialized comments in class with a response. Others remained silent for their own self-preservation, opting to choose their battles carefully so as not to become overburdened. Nina describes an experience in class,

In lecture, one boy was talking about how he says “nigga.” And it’s like, no you can’t. What are you talking about? That’s the one thing that bothers me. You’re outside of the cultural group, how are you going to get permission? You can’t say it. *Did you respond back in lecture?* No, I just sat in my little seat. Sometimes it’s hard to articulate myself in lecture. That, and I was all pissed. I don’t want to hear about it. I don’t want to hear it. I don’t want to be engaged in the conversation because it’s stupid to me.

Even though this student makes a comment that greatly offends Nina, she chooses to remain silent. She decides that she does not want to engage in this type of conversation because it may be fruitless to do so. Nina appears to view the comment as ignorant and “stupid” and does not see the point in taking the dialogue any further. She also admits that it is hard to articulate herself in lecture at times. This may be due to the burden that is placed on Black students to be the racial representative at times. Some students may feel like they have to be ready with a carefully planned response every time someone makes a racialized assumption. This is extremely difficult to do and places a lot of pressure on Black students. In addition, Nina’s choosing to remain silent may also be an act of resistance in terms of her own self-preservation. It can be tiring and burdensome to feel like you have to respond each time a student makes a racialized comment. Racial microaggressions and student’s persistent efforts to resist them can create extreme emotional, psychological and physiological distress known as racial battle fatigue (Smith et al.,

2007). In order to avoid racial battle fatigue that can have physical and mental health consequences, some Black students might make the conscious choice to remain silent at times.

Humor

Finally, Black students utilized humor to resist racial microaggressions. Several students talked about how they played with racial stereotypes in an effort to challenge people's racialized assumptions. For example, many Black men I interviewed talked about how they were often thought to be athletes. Some of them would poke fun at this racialized notion in their own way. Anthony discusses his encounters with the athlete stereotype,

My roommates last year, I was sitting down. This happens a lot. They ask you, "So, do you play any sports?" I'm like, "No." They're like, "Oh, do you like basketball though? You look like a basketball player to me." That happens all the time. I went to the bank back home to get a loan and the lady I was doing work with, she's like "Oh, do you play any sports at UCLA?" She was an old White lady. I told her I play volleyball. I guess at first I was thrown back by it but now I just laugh it off. [At first] I was like, "Why do you think that? Just because I'm Black?" I'd ask them that and they'd go "Oh, no, no, no that's not why. You just look like it to me."

Even when Anthony is sitting down and people are not aware of his actual height, he is believed to be an athlete. In reality, Anthony is tall and thin but he looks to be about average height; he is nowhere near the average height of most basketball players. Yet, his non-Black roommates still thought he "looked like a basketball player." When he first encountered this microaggression, he used to directly confront people about their racialized assumptions. Now, he laughs it off and uses humor to deflect this microaggression. Playing with the athlete stereotype, he tells the woman at the bank that he is on the volleyball team, a sport not commonly associated with Blacks. In a less confrontational way, Anthony resists the microaggression that is placed upon him and challenges this woman's racialized assumption.

Similar to Anthony, Aaron also uses humor to resist microaggressions. However, Aaron faces slightly different stereotypes. Aaron is a Black male athlete who is majoring in the sciences. He recognizes that many non-Black students do not believe that he is smart enough to be in math and science courses because of his race and his athleticism. Aaron decides to play with the microaggression of intellectual inferiority in very interesting ways,

[Their] expectation is that I fail. Man, I go in my classes sometimes on purpose. These are high science classes. You have to do this, get this grade in order to even be in the classroom. I walk in there. "Is this history of ancient arts?" People look at me. "This guy is in the damn wrong class." "Just kidding." So they expect me to do that. They don't expect me to be in the class... And it's funny because sometimes I get extra Eboniced up, especially when I see Asians or Whites around me or looking at us funny because it's like- "Yeah, I act like this and I'm doing the class that you're doing too." Some of them, "You didn't even get in my class. Don't even look at me like that." It's just rubbing it in people's faces sometimes because they give you certain looks.

Aaron uses humor to challenge the racial microaggression of intellectual inferiority. He purposefully pretends to be in the wrong class so that he can then push people to recognize their own racialized assumptions when they find out that he actually is a member of the class. He also uses Ebonics when he feels that he is getting negative attention from non-Black students. These student's stares and looks convey to Aaron that he is not welcome in the space and does not deserve to be there. Aaron actually decides to play on other stereotypes these students have by speaking in Ebonics, a language associated with Black people. When Aaron plays up the Ebonics, he creates a hyper visibility. By doing so, he takes control of the stares and looks in the room. By performing an exaggerated and stereotyped version of Blackness, Aaron communicates to these students that this is also his space and he asserts his right to be in the class. He directly challenges their non-verbal microaggressions.

Implications

The racial microaggressions that Black students face and the equalization strategies they utilize to contest racism may create some serious physical and mental health consequences. In higher education, Black students face the challenge of having to prove their own worth (Smith et al. 2007; Solorzano et al. 2002). This burden may ultimately contribute to racial battle fatigue. Scholars have theorized that racial microaggressions and the resistance strategies that students employ can create racial battle fatigue (Smith et al. 2007; Solorzano et al. 2002). Racial microaggressions create extreme emotional, psychological and physiological distress known as racial battle fatigue. Physiological symptoms can include tension headaches, loss of appetite and extreme fatigue (Smith et al. 2007; Solorzano et al. 2002). The psychological and emotional symptoms include persistent anxiety, loss of self-confidence and frustration (Sue et al. 2009; Smith, et al., 2007; Solorzano et al. 2002). The burden of having to constantly challenge racism may wear heavily on students. It is important to recognize the effects that constant racial microaggressions and persistent resistance may have on Black students.

The physical and mental health issues created by racial battle fatigue can impact Black students academically. If students are faced with a hostile campus climate that can create such symptoms as stress, anxiety, loss of sleep and depression, then they will be far less likely to perform well academically (Solorzano et al. 2002). Students' grades may suffer and they might withdraw socially. If students' GPA fall too low, they risk being placed on academic probation and ultimately having to leave the university altogether. Some Black students may actively choose to leave the university because of the toll that these microaggressions can take on their physical and mental health (Yosso et al. 2004) These factors work to push Black and other students of color out of the university. Black students continue to be drastically underrepresented in higher education and they have low retention and graduation rates (Harper, 2006; Person and

Christensen, 1996; Allen, 1992). Racial microaggressions can work to further exacerbate an already dire situation. We need to understand racial microaggressions the various ways they manifest themselves, via class, gender and other social locations, in order to figure out how to better support Black students and create a healthier campus climate.

Discussion

My findings document the raced, classed and gendered microaggressions that Black students encounter at the university. Non-Black students utilize these racial microaggressions as a way of drawing rigid boundaries between themselves and Black students. Numerous studies have documented the racialized experiences of Black students in higher education (Solorzano et al. 2000; Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984). Few studies have examined how racial microaggressions connect to gender and class. Recently studies have examined how racial microaggressions can be both raced and gendered (Sue et al. 2009; Solorzano, 1998). However, only a few of these works have focused specifically on the raced and gendered microaggressions that Black students experience (Smith et al. 2007). My work adds to this growing literature by revealing the different types of microaggressions that Black men and women encounter based on their race and gender.

Black men and women encounter microaggressions where they are stereotyped as exotic, hypersexual and aggressive. However, these microaggressions operate differently for men and women. In terms of exoticizing, non-Black students expect Black women to have knowledge about cultural elements such as hair, dance and food. On the other hand, non-Black students exoticize Black men for their *perceived* athleticism. Prior research has found that Black men have been stereotyped as athletes at the university (Solorzano et al. 2002). I find that this stereotype works to not only devalue Black men's intelligence but also objectifies them in a physical and sexual way.

Black men and women also encounter microaggressions of hyper-sexuality but again these differ by gender. Black men are treated as sexual predators and Black women are viewed as sexually promiscuous. This reflects the historic representations of Black men as the sexually aggressive “rapist” and Black women as the promiscuous “jezebel” (Collins, 2005). Black women and men often contend with the microaggression of aggressiveness. However, Black women tend to be perceived as intimidating whereas Black men are viewed as physically threatening. The policing of Black men throughout the educational pipeline have been documented (Smith et al. 2007; Lopez, 2004; Ferguson, 2000). Black men have historically been characterized as violent while Black women have been characterized as loud and pushy (Collins, 2005). Through conducting a systematic analysis of the experiences of Black men and women at the university, I demonstrate how the microaggressions they encounter are connected to both race and gender. A raced and gendered analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of Black men and women in higher education.

I also found that some microaggressions that Black students experienced were connected to both race and class. Non-Black students frequently assumed that all Black students were poor and came from low-income neighborhoods. So the class backgrounds of middle class Black students was frequently mistaken or mischaracterized. Other studies have also found that Blacks are often stereotyped to be poor even when they are middle class (Collins, 2005; Feagin and Sikes, 1995). Non-Black students also tended to have exaggerated perceptions of what low-income neighborhoods were like which worked to further exoticize and alienate students who were from those areas. Few studies have analyzed how microaggressions are both raced and classed. My work fills this gap by focusing on how racial microaggressions can be rooted in class-based assumptions.

My findings also demonstrate that Black students continue to experience both explicit and more subtle racial microaggressions at the university, regardless of gender and class background. Black students encountered messages that they did not belong at UCLA that leads to their isolation and alienation on campus. This echoes the findings of earlier work that Black students are alienated when attending historically White universities and must contend with a hostile campus climate (Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1992). This campus climate may be even more hostile given recent budget cuts and attacks on affirmative action (Yosso et al. 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Carroll et al, 2000). Given this changing context, I found that Black students encountered negative racialized assumptions about their intellectual ability and doubt that they “earned” their admission to the university from non-Black students. This is consistent with previous research that found that Black students encounter assumptions that they gained their admission due to affirmative action policies (Yosso et al. 2004; Solorzano et al. 2002; Solorzano et al., 2000).

Prior research has documented that Black students experience exclusion on campus (Solorzano et al, 2000; Thomas et al. 1981; Allen, 1981). I also found that Black students at UCLA faced similar types of exclusion, particularly in academic settings such as study groups or when working with other students on group projects. I found that non-Black students were then often surprised when Black students defied common stereotypes. Researchers have found that Black students are sometimes singled out as exceptions to their racial group (Solorzano et al. 2002; Solorzano, 1998). Other microaggressions include offensive comments being made in class by professors, racial jokes and the targeting of Black students by campus authorities. These findings remain consistent with prior research that found that Black students encountered racial

jokes, offensive comments and were policed on campus (Sue et al. 2009; Smith et al., 2007; Solorzano et al. 2002; Solorzano, 1998).

Finally, this work reveals the multiple ways Black students resist these microaggressions. Students drew on their intellect and prepare collectively or individually to “beast” or debate other students in class and spend time educating other students particularly when offensive comments were made. Other scholars have found that students of color often respond to racial microaggressions through “proving others wrong” (Solorzano et al. 2002). When Black students “beast” other students, this is a way of also showing non-Black students and faculty that their stereotypes and beliefs about Blacks are wrong.

In addition, Black students would often utilize silence and humor to empower and preserve themselves in situations where they were faced with microaggressions. These techniques can be understood as equalization strategies because they demonstrate how (soon-to-be) professional Blacks contend with racism (Lamont and Fleming, 2005). Professional Blacks have utilized their intelligence, competence and education to challenge racism (Lamont and Fleming, 2005). Similarly, I found that Black students also draw on their intellect to combat racial microaggressions. However, I extend the work on equalization strategies by highlighting other ways that Black students contest racism such as via “beasting,” educating others, silence and humor. This work further demonstrates the everyday strategies that Black students use to resist racism on campus.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This dissertation demonstrates the significance of race, class and gender in the lives of Black students at UCLA. Each of these social locations creates boundaries for Black students that shape their experiences on campus. These boundaries constrict and confine students but students also find ways to creatively navigate and traverse them. This dissertation argues that race, class and gender create boundaries that are simultaneously rigid and fluid. These boundaries pose challenges that Black students must negotiate in their everyday lives. In many ways, Black students face considerable obstacles while at the university that can interfere with their pursuit of higher education. To be a Black student at UCLA often means to be overburdened by obstacles posed by race, class and gender. At the same time, it also signifies a resilience; being a bright, young scholar at the university despite the issues that can arise from one's own social location.

I find that race, class and gender shape Black students' lives in different ways at the university. Race intersects with class and gender to create microaggressions that Black students experience throughout their time on campus. Black students encounter these microaggressions within the larger university context by non-Black faculty and students in ways that affects both their academic and social lives. Non-Black students and faculty utilize raced, classed and gendered microaggressions to establish rigid boundaries between them and Black students. Racial identity becomes particularly significant within the Black on-campus community. The university context creates rigid boundaries around expectations of Black racial identity that create challenges for Black students on campus. Finally, class emerges as another important social location in Black students' lives. Fluid class boundaries create common financial

challenges for Black students towards the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum and more rigid boundaries between them and those at the higher end of the spectrum.

Summary of Main Findings

In chapter 2, I found that there are fluid class boundaries between the Black lower middle-class and low-income students due to their shared financial instability. In contrast, more economic privilege among the solidly middle-class and rigid class boundaries between them and their Black low-income and lower middle-class peers. Black lower middle-class students are more similar to their low-income Black peers. The common link between these two groups of students is financial instability. In fact, many Black students from lower middle-class backgrounds were once low-income and had achieved some social mobility, bringing them to a lower middle-class status. Yet, their families often lived paycheck-to-paycheck and struggled financially. The families of several students had either experienced upward or downward mobility over time.

Because low-income and lower middle-class students came from financially unstable backgrounds, they faced similar financial challenges at the university. Black lower middle-class students often lacked enough financial aid to pay for their college expenses, particularly their housing costs. On the other hand, Black students from low-income backgrounds typically received enough financial aid to cover their college expenses but they were often required to contribute financially to their families. In addition, Black students from low-income backgrounds and those from the lower middle-class understand their class background and perceive their Black peers in similar ways. These students both saw their background as being one of “struggle” but also were empowered to forge ahead and pursue their education in order to be

social mobile. They also perceived a significant social distance between themselves and their Black peers from solidly middle-class backgrounds.

Black students from solidly middle-class backgrounds were financially privileged in comparison to these other two groups. These students had “enough” growing up but they were not raised with excess goods and luxuries. Only a small segment of the solidly middle-class were actually upper middle-class and grew up with excess money. Most of the solidly middle-class had financial concerns but faced few severe financial challenges like lower middle-class and low-income students. Many of them also recognized their privilege in terms of how they drew meaning from their class background and interacted with students from other class backgrounds on campus. This demonstrates the more rigid boundaries between the solidly middle-class and those from less privileged class backgrounds.

These findings are significant in that they reveal the heterogeneity of Black students in how class shapes experiences at the university. This contributes to higher education research that has just recently begun exploring the diversity among Black students (Harper, 2007; Cuyjet, 2006; Fries-Britt, 1998). It answers the call put forth by these scholars to examine how other social locations such as class and gender affect the experiences of Black students (Harper, 2007; Cuyjet, 2006; Fries-Britt, 1998). Lacy (2007) and Pattillo-McCoy (1999) focus on solidly middle-class neighborhoods and lower middle-class neighborhoods respectively. Lacy (2007) also focuses on how people negotiate their upper middle-class identity in their neighborhood. My work extends the research conducted by Lacy (2007) and Pattillo-McCoy (1999) by focusing on young adults and how they negotiate their solidly middle-class and lower middle-class backgrounds in a higher education context. Pattillo-McCoy (1999) and Jackson (2001) reveal the fluid class boundaries between low income and lower middle-class Blacks. Similar to Pattillo-

McCoy (1999) and Jackson (2001), this study also reveals the nature of fluid class boundaries and how this connects lower middle-class and low-income Blacks. In contrast, I find that there are more rigid boundaries between these groups and the solidly middle-class. This finding reflects prior research that has highlighted the boundaries between Blacks at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum and those at the higher end (Lacy 2007). I also illuminate how class influences the types of financial challenges that Black students experience at the university. By revealing how Black students struggle and negotiate their economic difficulties firsthand utilizing qualitative data, I add further depth to the existing quantitative literature on Black students and financial challenges in higher education (Chen and DesJardins, 2010; Long and Riley, 2007; St. John et al. 2005).

In Chapter 3, I show how the university context creates rigid boundaries around expectations of Black racial identity for Black students. Because there are so few of them on campus, Black students encounter an expectation from their Black peers that they be connected to the larger Black community at the university. This expectation of connection is rooted in the idea of giving back to the Black community. While this expectation has long existed in the larger Black community (Dawson, 1994), the current university climate may heighten this expectation even further. The severe under-representation of Black students due to the elimination of affirmative action and recent admissions/enrollment crises may push Black students even more to feel responsible for helping the Black community both on and off campus. Being connected to the Black community provides Black students the opportunity to give back to others.

This expectation of connection is expressed in three main ways: through participation in Black student organizations, attending Black student events and having Black social networks. I analyze how some Black students are able to meet these expectations of Black racial identity

while others are constrained from doing so. I also show how some Black students may actually be uncomfortable with forging these connections and as a result, they fail to meet these expectations of Black racial identity. Black students wind up situating themselves into three distinct groups of what I call the “connected,” “constrained” and “barely visible.”

Those Black students who are “connected” are able to meet expectations of Black racial identity. These are students who tend to participate in Black student organizations, attend Black student events regularly and maintain Black social networks. Many of these students find community on campus through their participation in Black student organizations and attending Black student events. These organizations also perform a lot of outreach work to the local Black community in Los Angeles and work to increase access to the university for Black students. The “constrained” have work, family responsibilities and other obligations (e.g. student-athletes) that keep them from meeting these expectations of Black racial identity. The “barely visible” students have had few links to other Blacks growing up and as a result, they feel uncomfortable around other Black students. Other “barely visible” students are LGBTQ identified Blacks who sometimes view Black on-campus spaces as heteronormative and alienating.

When Black students fail to meet these expectations, they are often “policed” by their peers. For example, students are often asked to account for their whereabouts by other Black peers when they do not participate in Black student organizations or attend Black student events. This policing demonstrates the rigid boundaries around Black racial identity at the university and signals to students the expectations around racial identity for Black students. It makes them aware that these are the types of actions and behaviors that they are expected to engage in and that they will face sanctioning if they do not follow them.

These expectations of Black racial identity are difficult for Black students to meet. For most students, it is extremely challenging to fulfill both their academic and community responsibilities. This large number of commitments burdens black students. As a result, many students employ negotiation strategies in order to deal with these expectations. Sometimes, these strategies involve stepping away from Black student organizations completely so that they can focus their full attention on their academic work. Other times, it involves strategically attending events but saying no at other times.

Prior work has shown that Blackness is a constructed project (Pattillo, 2007). This work also demonstrates that Blackness is constructed, specifically examining this construction process within higher education. Only a few studies have examined Black racial identity at the university (Willie, 2003; Gurin and Epps, 1975). However, these studies do not analyze the way context shapes Black racial identity. Prior research has looked at context and racial identity (Lacy, 2007; Butterfield, 2004; Warikoo, 2004) but few studies have examined how context shapes racial identity in higher education. My study focuses on how the higher education context influences expectations of Black racial identity for Black students.

I also show how certain spaces on campus could be utilized to express Black racial identity. Counter-spaces such as Black student organizations are sites free from racial microaggressions that have been shown to be spaces of comfort and connection for Black students (Solórzano et al. 2002; Solórzano et al. 2000). Through these spaces, Black students are able to develop ties with other Black students, engage in campus efforts and outreach to local Black communities. I extend the work on counter-spaces by showing how Black students' participation and roles in these sites are ways of expressing Black racial identity. I also find that when Black students do not meet expectations of Black racial identity, their Black peers often

“police” their behavior. This policing implies that Black students are supposed to meet expectations of being connected to the larger Black community on-campus and when they do not, they are forced to explain themselves. Prior work has found that some Blacks utilize rigid boundaries to distinguish themselves from one another (Lacy, 2007). The policing that Black students experience by their peers demonstrates the rigid nature of these boundaries and how students impose them to characterize who is a part of the community and who is not. This type of policing is tied to notions of racial authenticity. Hunter (2005) defines racial authenticity as acceptance and recognition as a legitimate member of the group. In my study, Black students utilize policing to mark membership within the Black community and distinguish “outsiders.” This dissertation extends the work on racial authenticity (Hunter, 2005) by looking at how it operates within a higher education context.

Finally, this work adds to the literature on cultural taxation (Joseph and Hirshfield, 2004; Padilla, 1994). Faculty of color often experience cultural taxation when they are constantly asked to mentor students of color and participate in diversity committees in addition to their other professional responsibilities because they are so underrepresented (Joseph and Hirshfield, 2004; Padilla, 1994). In a similar way, I find that Black undergraduate students also experience cultural taxation. Because they are so severely underrepresented, many Black students are over-burdened by these expectations to perform community work and support the Black community. With this finding, I show how the idea of cultural taxation can also be applied to Black undergraduate students in university contexts where, like faculty of color, they are also underrepresented.

In Chapter 4, I find that raced, classed and gendered microaggressions are a part of life at the university for many Black students. With regards to gender, Black women and men were both exoticized by non-Black students but in different ways. Black women are often seen as the

cultural authorities with knowledge about hair, dance and food while Black men were assumed to be athletes and objectified for their perceived physicality. In addition, Black women and men encountered microaggressions of hyper-sexuality. Black women were perceived as promiscuous while Black men were viewed as sexual threats. Finally, Black men and women were perceived as aggressive but this operated in different ways as well. Black women were seen as intimidating while Black men were viewed as physically threatening. In terms of class, many Black students experienced the microaggression that they were poor even though several of these students came from middle-class areas. Non-Black students also made negative assumptions about the types of neighborhoods that these students came from.

There were also racial microaggressions that Black students experienced, regardless of their gender or class background. Non-Black students frequently challenged the presence of Black students in the university, believing that they did not deserve to be there and were likely admitted due to affirmative action. Black students encountered this belief about their admission to the university and affirmative action even though affirmative action has been banned from UCLA since the 1990's. Related to these ideas of merit, Black students also encountered doubts about their intellectual ability. Black students were often excluded from study groups and group projects. When Black students made contributions in class or performed well academically, non-Black students were often surprised. This microaggression reminded Black students that their non-Black peers consistently doubted their intellectual capabilities.

Black students were also frequently targeted as disruptive or troublemakers by university officials. They were usually blamed whenever there was an incident on campus. Non-Black faculty targeted Black students in a more subtle way. They often made insensitive and deficit claims about Black people in lectures. A third way Black students were targeted was through

racial jokes. Black students encountered racial jokes made by non-Black students that offended and alienated them. In response to these racial microaggressions, Black students employed equalization strategies (Lamont and Fleming, 2005). These strategies included “beasting” and being the best in class, playing the role of “educator,” using humor, and remaining silence. Students drew upon these strategies to resist the racial microaggressions that they experienced.

These findings show the continued prevalence of racial microaggressions on historically White campuses today. This confirms the earlier and more recent work on racial microaggressions (Smith et al., 2007; Allen 1992; Fleming, 1984). In the wake of anti-affirmative action legislation and admissions controversies, Black students at this California university face a hostile and tense campus climate. I add to the literature on racial microaggressions by demonstrating how some of these racialized insults are also connected to class and gender. Prior research has examined the experiences of Black men in higher education and Chicana women (Smith et al., 2007; Solorzano, 1998). Black men have been found to experience surveillance on campus and Chicana women have encountered sexual harassment and jokes due to their gender (Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano, 1998). I conduct a systematic analysis of the experiences of Black men and women and I tease out the intersections between race and gender.

In addition, few studies have analyzed the relationship between race and class in microaggressions. I reveal how some microaggressions are connected to both race and class. Finally, I focus on the responses that Black students employ to resist these microaggressions. These can be thought of as “equalization strategies” (Lamont and Fleming, 2005). Though the research on equalization strategies (Lamont and Fleming, 2005) focuses on the experience of Black professionals and elites, my research extends this work into higher education. It shows

how young Black adults (pre-professionals) draw on the strengths and techniques they have developed to challenge racism.

Broader Implications

The Continuing Significance of Race

As this dissertation demonstrates, race plays a significant role in shaping the academic and social lives of Black students in higher education. This is evidenced in the racial microaggressions chapter as Black students encounter racialized insults from non-Black students and faculty. This works to alienate Black students and can cause racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2007; Solorzano et al., 2002). The effects of racial battle fatigue can have heavy psychological, emotional and physical costs on Black students. However, sometimes the realities of racism and its harsh effects are downplayed in society. Scholars have found that there is a general denial of racism in society today with many people and even some social scientists believing that the United States is now “post-racial” (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Feagin, 2000). For example, some might point to the end of the civil rights movement and the recent election of our nation’s first Black president, Barack Obama, as signs that the racial climate in this country has completely changed (Wise, 2009). However, I found that nearly all of the Black students in my study experienced some form of racism on campus, whether subtle or overt. Many students encountered numerous incidents of racism while at the university. Dealing with racism became a frequent part of their college experience.

Much of the hostility on campus that was directed towards Black students was due to beliefs about their getting admitted to the university due to affirmative action and recent changes in admissions policies over the years. Bonilla-Silva (2001) points out that people often connect their anti-affirmative action sentiments with ideas of fairness and equality for all, citing that

affirmative action “discriminates” against other “deserving” candidates. These ideas are similarly replicated in higher education as non-Black students question the merit of Black students and simultaneously assert their place as more “deserving” admits. Some non-Black students may even share stories about their “qualified” friends who did not get in. Non-Black students use concerns about affirmative action and the role of merit to hide racialized assumptions about Blacks. Affirmative action has actually been not been allowed in California since the 1990’s yet many Black students encounter comments about whether they had sufficient merit to gain admission to the university. As I have discussed in Chapter 4, these are ways of expressing notions of Black intellectual inferiority. This is evidence of how racialized assumptions often appear in subtle, veiled language.

Nevertheless, microaggressions such as these undermine the place of Black students at the university. Researchers should focus on higher education as a contested racialized terrain. With budget cuts and the elimination of affirmative action in many states, admission to universities, especially to those that are highly selective will be even further debated. The admission of Blacks and other students of color will continue to come under fire and students at these institutions will likely continue to experience strong racial hostility on campus. Race matters and it takes on both subtle and overt forms in higher education that should be further explored.

This study also shows that race is very much a part of the lives of young people. College students many of whom are in their late teens and early twenties, reproduce larger racialized notions in their interactions with different groups. These ideas about Blacks are not new but rather a sad and ugly reality of our nation’s history. And young adults today still espouse these same racial ideologies. Racism is not strictly a thing of the past nor is it simply a part of an

earlier generation's history. Today's generation of young adults still hold these racialized assumptions about racial groups. In the case of this study, racialized notions about Blacks play a role in many of these campus interactions.

In addition, the perpetrator of these racialized notions in many cases are not only White students but East Asians and Middle Easterners as well. On many college campuses, particularly in California, East Asians are the dominant student population or a close second majority to Whites. This is an example of a new racial context in many colleges and universities. Within this new context, racism is still reproduced as many of these students hold racialized assumptions about Blacks. While East Asians and Middle Eastern students may also experience racism, they may adopt racialized views of Blacks in order to distance themselves from Blacks and maintain a higher position in the racial hierarchy. However, these groups are still treated as "forever foreigner" and continue to lack power within our society's racialized structure (Zhou, 2004).

The realities of residential segregation and lack of interracial contact may also play a role in the adoption of these racialized views about Blacks. Many East Asian and Middle Eastern students live in residentially segregated areas (many reside in predominantly White and/or Asian communities) and have had little contact with Blacks growing up. Their exposure to Blacks has likely been through the media with very stereotypic portrayals of Black life. East Asian and Middle Eastern students seemingly adopt these stereotypic ideas as their own. All of these factors may help to explain why some East Asian and Middle Eastern students espouse racialized notions of Blacks.

Future research should examine these new racial contexts in higher education to further understand how these racial boundaries are drawn among different groups at the university. While Black students spoke of the racial microaggressions that they experienced at the hands of

East Asian and Middle Eastern students, many expressed camaraderie with Latino and Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students (e.g. Filipinos, Cambodians, Samoans). Black students spoke about living in the same neighborhoods with these groups and that they have all experienced similar racial and economic struggles. In addition, the campus has retention organizations for Black, Latino and Southeast Asian students that are all housed in the same building so Black students may have built strong relationships with these students in these spaces. These racial boundaries of division and cohesiveness between different racial/ethnic groups warrant further study.

Black students employ equalization strategies (Lamont and Fleming, 2005) to deal with racial microaggressions. They draw on such techniques as intellect, humor and silence to resist these racial microaggressions. Similarly, Lamont and Fleming (2005) found that professional Blacks utilized their intelligence, competence and education to combat racism. However, we need to consider how resisting these microaggressions might result in racial battle fatigue for Black students as well as for professional Blacks (who these students will likely become in the future). Many scholars focus on racism but few actually examine how responses to racism and the consequences of responses on individuals (Smith et al. 2007). While resistance can be empowering, it can also be a burden to be bombarded by microaggressions and having to resist them all of the time. Researchers should further examine how microaggressions and resistance affect Black students and professional Blacks.

The Important Role of Racial Identity

Much of the focus on race in higher education has been on racial microaggressions (Smith et al. 2007; Solorzano, 2000). While understanding how racism works within this context is important, the impact of the higher education context on racial identity is also significant. Low

numbers of Black students at the university create rigid boundaries around expectations of Black racial identity. These rigid expectations greatly shape the experiences of Black students on campus. There are tensions around expectations of involvement on campus that Black students have to constantly negotiate. These tensions arise not only from low-numbers of Black students at the university but also due to a lack of university support for outreach and community efforts that many Black students engage in.

These findings raise questions about the role that the university context plays in shaping academic and social challenges for Black and other students of color on campus. Underrepresentation at the university pushes students to get involved in order to work for change but this often occurs at their own expense. Many students have difficulty balancing their academic and community commitments; their grades and ultimately their retention at the university can suffer as a result. Future studies should examine higher education context, particularly underrepresentation, and the effect it has on students at the university.

Inherent in these expectations of involvement is the notion of giving back. Michael Dawson (1994) talks about the idea of linked fate, that Blacks often see their fate as being tied to that of the race. Because of linked fate (Dawson, 1994), many Blacks, especially those that are upwardly mobile, may feel that they should help other Blacks. At the university, this giving back is manifested through participating in Black student organizations and community work. This is where we catch the first glimpses of giving back in action. We can think of the higher education context as a training ground for racial identity expectations. While Black students may have learned about the importance of giving back as they grew up, it is in college where this idea is put into practice on a larger scale. Students have the opportunity to get involved in outreach

efforts with many of their Black peers. The idea of linked fate (Dawson, 1994) becomes practice in this context.

And the notion of giving back is likely to stay with these students after they graduate. As future Black professionals, they may also be drawn to help the larger Black community in some form. This raises questions as to what these expectations of Black racial identity will look like for Black professionals. What issues regarding racial authenticity might arise for this group? Scholars have explored racial authenticity in other arenas (Hunter, 2005; Jackson, 2001). In this dissertation, I demonstrate how meeting expectations of Black racial identity are connected to notions of racial authenticity. Future research should examine Black racial identity and racial authenticity for professional Blacks. In addition, research on these areas within the higher education context is needed as well.

The Necessity of Intersectionality: Race, Class and Gender

While race greatly influences the experiences of Black students in higher education, there are also key moments where it intersects with class and gender. These intersections shape the experiences of Black students on campus. For example, several of the racial microaggressions that Black students experience are connected to notions of class or gender. This is important because it demonstrates how Black students are targeted in particular ways based on their own social location at the university. Even though Black men and women encounter similar racial microaggressions, they experience them differently. Black men and women encounter microaggressions about their aggressiveness, sexuality and cultural representation/knowledge that manifests in different ways based on their race and gender. This adds further depth to how we understand racial microaggressions. It demonstrates the nuances of these racialized insults and how they create variations in experience for Black men and women.

These raced and gendered microaggressions are reflective of the historic representations of Blacks in our society. Historic images of the Black “rapist,” “jezebel,” “loud and pushy mammy” and “criminal” continue to be a part of the way that Black men and women are constructed (Collins, 2005). These ideas influence the different ways that Black men and women are perceived and treated at the university. For example, non-Black students often view Black male students as sexual and physical threats. As a result, Black male students are placed under surveillance, their behavior policed. Non-Black students often perceive Black women as intimidating and promiscuous. Black women encounter sanctioning from non-Black students due to these perceptions. This demonstrates how larger societal notions of race and gender impact Black students at the university.

Prior research has focused on the racial microaggressions that Black men experience, particularly their being policed at the university (Smith et al. 2007). Through conducting a systematic gender analysis, I expand on the current research on Black men. I document aspects of their experience such as their being exoticized for their perceived athleticism and their being stereotyped as “sexual predators” on campus. These findings draw attention to other facets of Black men’s experiences in higher education. I also analyze the racial and gendered microaggressions that Black women experience. Few studies have examined the microaggressions that Black women encounter at the university. An analysis of Black men’s and women’s experiences provide insight into how their lives are shaped in different ways by race and gender.

Although much of the current research has focused on the racialized experiences of Black students at the university, the findings of this work demonstrates that race does not exist in isolation. When Black students encounter racialized insults on campus, they are often

experiencing microaggressions that are gendered as well. Future studies should capture intersectional experiences at the university as they relate to race and gender. Analyses of race and gender are needed to more fully understand how different racial groups, particularly those of color, experience higher education.

In addition to gender, Black students can also experience racial microaggressions that are connected to other social locations such as class. Many Black students, regardless of class background, experienced the racialized assumption that they were poor but this also worked differently for the solidly middle-class and those from lower middle-class and low-income backgrounds. The solidly middle-class made attempts to challenge these notions of poverty with their backgrounds while those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were often exoticized for being from “dangerous neighborhoods.” In this way, race intersects with class to create variations in experience.

Scholars have just recently called for a more thorough examination of Black student diversity within higher education (Harper, 2007; Fries-Britt, 2006). My dissertation work responds to this call by adding more depth to this area of research. However, more studies on race, class and gender in higher education should be conducted. In addition, further work is needed on how race, class and gender work together to shape student experiences. In this dissertation, I have analyzed how gender and class connect with race. Research that is able to address the intersection of more than two social locations would add to this line of work.

Finally, I found that one intersection, race and class, greatly shaped the experiences of Black students on campus. Class affected the types of financial challenges Black students experienced, how they made meaning of their class background and perceived one another. Though I do not have a White comparison group in this study, prior literature suggests that race

and class operates differently for Blacks than it does for Whites (Jackson, 2001; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Oliver and Shapiro, 1995). There is greater class fluidity for Blacks at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. This is evidenced in my study with the finding that the lower middle-class are more similar to those from low-income backgrounds. There is greater distance from the solidly middle-class. These findings demonstrate the importance of examining the heterogeneity among Black students. Black students from particular class backgrounds, such as those from the lower middle-class, might face challenges at the university that are largely under-explored. Future studies should examine the significance of class as well as other social locations in the lives of Black students.

Moreover, research should analyze class fluidity within higher education but also within the larger society. A few studies have delved into the effect of Black class fluidity on neighborhoods and interactions (Jackson, 2001; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). We need to further understand how this class fluidity might shape the life chances and outcomes for low-income and lower middle-class Black students throughout the K-12 pipeline and the communities they come from. Given the recent economic downturn, an examination of class fluidity and upward/downward mobility seems particularly critical at this time. Moreover, what is the significance of rigid boundaries between these groups and the solidly middle-class? These rigid boundaries may create division but people on both sides may negotiate these boundary lines in interesting ways. Future research is needed to unpack the intersection of race and class among Blacks as well as other groups of color.

Practical Implications

My research demonstrates that the background characteristics and experiences of Black students from the lower middle class are more similar to that of low-income students and this

should be considered as higher education policy defines what it means to be low-income. Low-income should be redefined to include a more expansive income threshold in order to capture the realities of living in an expensive state such as California (where families tend to earn more but can not stretch their money far) and to include families who lack economic instability. Class can be defined in a multidimensional via a combination of such factors as parental income, occupation, parent educational attainment, number of dependents and upward/downward mobility from childhood to the present. This will allow students to obtain more aid particularly those who occupy a tenuous middle status that is largely unstable (e.g. lower middle-class). Also, more support can be offered to low-income and lower middle-class students who are financially struggling and supporting their families. For example, outreach services and support programs can better help these students deal with financial challenges and excel at the university.

With regard to racial identity, my findings are applicable to large, public selective universities. Black students continue to be underrepresented within higher education and with many states having abolished affirmative action; the numbers of Black and other students of color have dropped significantly. This severe under-representation of Black students can further exacerbate tensions around expectations of racial identity. Students may feel even more pressure to give back to the larger Black community and engage in outreach and admissions efforts at the expense of their academic responsibilities. While universities may be partaking in their own admissions efforts, the issues that Black students face on campus suggest that they need more support. Universities can try to engage in more outreach and community efforts to help alleviate this burden on students. Universities can partner with these student organizations so that these groups can get the support that they need. In addition, universities can engage in dialogue with

these students to figure out ways to better support these students in their community and academic commitments.

My work on racial microaggressions demonstrates how these racialized insults continue to be a significant part of campus life for Black students. Some racial microaggressions are connected with class and gender that create distinct experiences for Black students at the university. Given the pervasiveness of racial microaggressions on many college campuses, universities should make every effort to foster a welcoming campus climate for Black and other students of color. Universities should be committed to admitting and enrolling a diverse student body. Within the general education requirements, there should be several “diversity” classes that all students are required to take. Students should be required to participate in intergroup dialogue courses on race, gender, class and sexuality to encourage communication and understandings across categories of difference. University staff positions such as resident assistants and campus security personnel should reflect the diversity of the student body. Universities should actively create regular programming on race, class, gender and sexuality issues and all students should be encouraged, if not required, to attend.

There should be a zero tolerance policy for any racially motivated incident on campus and universities must take swift action on any student who violates this policy. All students should feel safe and protected on campus. According to my data, many Black students do not necessarily feel that way and have experienced harassment without appropriate university action. Moreover, students who experience racial microaggressions need strong supportive spaces on campus. Counter-spaces such as the Black student union and other Black student organizations provide this type of support and universities can make sure that these groups are adequately funded and well-resourced. Some Black students who experience racial microaggressions may

not feel comfortable going to Black student organizations or they may not have the time if they carry work, family and athletic responsibilities. There should be institutionalized forms of support to meet the needs of these students as well.

Without institutional change, these issues will affect Black student access and retention in higher education. Universities must be committed to developing effective educational practices such as programming, policy and curriculum to increase opportunity for Black and other underrepresented students to receive the quality education that they deserve.

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