TO BE YOUNG, BLACK, AND RESILIENT:
NAVIGATING A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

by

Jasmine N. Strickland

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Approved by:

_____
Dr. Andrea Freidus

_____
Dr. Lorenzo Hopper

_____
Dr. Cathy Howell

_____
Dr. Shawn Long

_____
Dr. Coral Wayland

ABSTRACT

JASMINE N. STRICKLAND. To Be Young, Black, and Resilient: Navigating a Predominantly White University. (Under the direction of ANDREA FREIDUS)

The current study examines how Black undergraduate students at a predominantly White university respond to the racism they encounter on campus. Specifically, the case study seeks to identify (a) the response strategies that Black undergraduate students utilize to help them endure racism on campus and (b) what these students learn from their racialized experiences. Qualitative research methodology captures the lived experiences of 12 Black undergraduate students through an online questionnaire and in-person, semi-structured interviews to gain insight into how they navigate racism on their White campus.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the members of my family who are guiding me in spirit.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The racialized experiences of Black[1] students who attend predominantly White institutions of higher education in the U.S. have been well documented. Specifically, there is a plethora of research on the impact of racial stereotypes and microaggressions on the overall college experience of Black students who attend these institutions (e.g., Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Fries-Britt, 1997; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2009, 2012, 2015; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017; Jackson & Moore, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). However, as Harper (2013) maintained, "most of what has been written on Black students at PWIs focuses on the challenges they face and a range of understandable, yet problematic responses to racism (e.g., withdrawal, lowered self-confidence, and aspiration reduction)" (p. 199). I concur with Harper (2013) that more emphasis needs to be placed on "understanding how these students manage to craft productive responses to racism and factors that enable them to excel…despite their encounters with racial microaggressions, stereotypes, and low expectations" (p. 200). With that being said, the purpose of the study is twofold: first, to explore the racism response strategies of Black undergraduate students who attend Mid-Atlantic University (MAU) and second, to uncover what they perceive as the main takeaways from their confrontations with racism on campus.

This study is significant because there is a dearth of literature that examines the "psychological resistance and the sociopolitical strategies employed by those who consciously decide to defy racist stereotypes, exceed expectations, and offer more

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[1]Black and African American are used interchangeably throughout this thesis depending on how it is used in the previous research. However, for the current study, I will use the term Black to include students with Caribbean and African descent (Williams, 2017).

affirming views of their individual selves and the Black male collective" (Harper, 2009, p. 699). In this regard, the current study will first, contribute to the literature regarding the navigational approaches that Black undergraduate students are using on a predominantly White campus. Second, it will give insight into how Black students reframe their racialized experiences on campus to positive takeaways that will assist them as they move into their next phase in life. Next, the study will serve as a resource for any Black student who is interested in knowing how other Black students navigate their PWI. Lastly, it will amplify the voices of Black students "as they engage in the process of resistance" (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 512).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that was used to inform the current study is Racial Microaggressions. This theory was selected for two reasons: first, it focused on the impact that racism has on racial and ethnic minorities rather than the intent of White individuals and second, it moves beyond the examination of the *reactions* to racism to the consideration of how people of color *respond* to racism. I hypothesize that doing so will help reveal how Black students at Mid-Atlantic University navigate the racist ideologies they are exposed to on their campus. In that manner, to grasp the concept of racial microaggressions, it is imperative to have an understanding of where they come from.

Racial Stereotypes

In short, racial stereotypes serve as the foundation for racial microaggressions. Racial stereotypes are over-generalized socially constructed beliefs that are used to categorize individuals who are perceived to belong to the same racial group and thereby share given characteristics (Green, 1998). Often, these stereotypes are "based upon a

combination of historical events, (negative) media depictions, and interpersonal interactions" (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 2000; as cited in Domingue, 2015, p. 461). Racial stereotypes can be placed into three general categories: (1) intelligence and educational stereotypes (e.g., Chow, 2017; Devarajan, 2018), (2) personality or character stereotypes (Estevez, 2016; Harris-Perry, 2011; Gorringe, Ross, & Fforde, 2011) and (3) physical appearance stereotypes (Guo & Harlow, 2014). In summary, racial stereotypes are the *ideologies* about the characteristics and traits of racially and ethnically minoritized persons, whereas the racist verbal and non-verbal communicative *acts* that are displayed are referred to as racial microaggressions.

Racial Microaggressions

Expanding on Pierce's (1970, 1980) work, Sue et al. (2007) defined racial microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (p. 273). In recent literature, racial microaggressions were defined as:

> [A] form of systemic racism in which verbal or nonverbal assaults are directed toward a person of color, often automatically or unconsciously. They are often based on not only a person of color's race/ethnicity but also how they intersect with other real or perceived differences of gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, accent, or surname. The impact of racial microaggressions is cumulative, taking a psychological and physiological toll on those who are targeted. (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015b, p. 1)

There are three forms of racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007): (1) microassault, (2) microinsult, and (3) microinvalidation. Firstly, a microassault is an "explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). These assaults are considered more "old-fashioned" forms of racism where people "only display notions of minority inferiority when they (a) lose control or (b) feel relatively safe to engage in a microassault" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274).

In comparison, a microinsult conveys rudeness and insensitivity towards a person's racial heritage or identity; however, they are subtler than microassaults and are "frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden message to the recipient of color" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). These can occur verbally (e.g., asking a person of Asian descent to help with a science or math problem) or they can occur nonverbally (e.g., a White woman clutching her purse when a Black or Latinx male approaches or passes by) (Sue et al., 2007).

Finally, microinvalidations are "communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). An example of a microinvalidation is when a Latinx couple is given poor service at a restaurant and are told by their White friends that they are "oversensitive" (Sue et al., 2007). This situation is problematic because their response invalidates the Latinx couple and diminishes the importance of the racial/ethnic experience (Sue et al., 2007). Amongst the three forms of racial microaggressions, there are nine categories that have been identified: (1) alien in own land, (2) ascription of

intelligence, (3) color blindness, (4) criminality/assumption of criminal status, (5) denial of individual racism, (6) myth of meritocracy, (7) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, (8) second-class citizen, and (9) environmental microaggressions (see Appendix A and B for more detail).

When analyzing microaggressions, four factors should be considered (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; see Figure 1.1):

1. Type: how one is targeted by a racial microaggression (e.g., verbal or nonverbal),

2. Context: where the racial microaggression occurs (e.g., classroom, residence hall, stores, or on the street),

3. Effect: the physiological and psychological consequence of the racial microaggression (e.g., racial battle fatigue, self-doubt, or anger), and

4. Response: how one responds to the racial microaggression (e.g., resistance, establishing counter-spaces, denial, self-policing).

Lastly, according to Smith et al. (2011), "[r]acism is omnipresent and therefore all racially subjugated people feel microaggressions, whether consciously or in a maladaptive state of denial. Therefore, People of Color in the U.S. confront the withering cumulative effects at both the individual and group level" (pp. 67-68). Therefore, having a greater understanding of racial microaggressions and response strategies "would be beneficial in arming children of color for the life they will face" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 283). Moreover, using racial microaggressions as a tool for critical race research allows us to "'see' the tangible ways in which racism emerges in everyday interactions" (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015, p. 302).

In conclusion, while it goes beyond the scope of my study, it is noteworthy to mention that applying racial microaggressions as a theoretical framework means uncovering the "formal or informal structural mechanisms, such as policies and processes that systematically subordinate, marginalize, and exclude non-dominant groups and mediates their experiences with racial microaggressions" (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015, p. 303). Also known as institutional racism.

Researcher's Positionality

As a Black researcher, I acknowledge that my positionality will inevitably influence every aspect of my research project. I am a 24-year-old self-identified woman who identifies as both an African American and Black American. I am both cisgender and heterosexual, meaning that nearly every signal in society reinforces my sexual and gender identity as the norm (Williams, 2017). I am able-bodied, and a native English speaker and thus do not seek any accommodations in the classroom. Lastly, since I have only attended predominantly White universities, I have first-hand experienced racism on White campuses.

These are my multiple identities, and I share them because I know they index things that will be significant during my research (Williams, 2017). I contend, like Williams (2017), that "the experiences we have, the identities we embody, and the positions we hold in systems of power impact how we see and navigate the world" (chap. 4). This is not only true for me, but also my participants. Their identities and biases will influence their experiences with racism on campus and the experiences they will choose to share during the various phases of my research. I highlight these issues as an effort to make aware of the prejudices my participants and I brought into this project.

Conclusively, my master's thesis, though based on the lived experiences and words Black undergraduate students at Mid-Atlantic University, will primarily be my interpretations of what they experienced.

Important Note from the Researcher

In the current study, I am attempting to shift the paradigm that generally centers Whiteness, caters to White un-intentionality, and nurtures White fragility, to one that focuses on the voices, experiences, and knowledge of Black students. Therefore, my thesis as a whole is **not** meant to assume the experiences of all Black students who attend Mid-Atlantic University *or* serves as an educational tool for how White faculty, staff, or students can do better. Instead, it is here to stand as a testament that there *is* such a thing as being young, Black, and resilient.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Within the past thirty years, several studies described how racism on college and university campuses resulted in the exclusion of Black students who attend PWIs (e.g., Allen, 1992; Beamon, 2014; Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Feagin, 1992; Fleming, 1985; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017; Love, 1993; Moore III, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003; Smedley & Harrell, 1993; Smith et al., 2007). The current literature revealed that the prevalence of racial stereotyping by White faculty, staff, and peers is one of the main reasons why Black students perceive their White campuses as an isolating, alienating, and hostile environment (Davis, 2004; Domingue, 2015; Fries-Britt, 1998; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper 2009, 2015; Hubain, Allen, Harris, & Linder, 2016; Steele, 2003; Sue et al., 2008, Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

Black college students' experiences with racial stereotypes through the form of racial microaggressions can result in the following:

1. Black students are assumed to be angry, aggressive, deviant, intellectually inferior, and from low-income neighborhoods, to name a few (Beaman, 2014; Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Cuyjet, 2006; Domingue, 2015; Fries-Britt, 1997; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2009, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Lewis, Mendenhall, & Harwood., 2013; Settles, 2006; Solórzano et al., 2000; see Appendix C for more examples),

2. Black students are expected by White administrators and professors to be a spokesperson for all Black people, as well as an expert on all issues concerning their race. In other words, Black students are anticipated to play

the role of the "Black token" as a way to help "White faculty and students feel comfortable about their efforts to be inclusive" (Hubain et al., 2016, p. 952; also see Davis, 2004; Fries-Britt, 1998; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper 2009, 2015; Sue et al., 2008, Winkle-Wagner, 2009),

3. Black students are viewed as a numerical racial minority by White professors and peers (Bonner, 2001; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2012; Solórzano et al., 2000; Strayhorn, 2009),

4. Black men are "niggered" (Harper, 2009) on campus when they are (a) told that they will unlikely accomplish much in life and that they are no good, (b) treated as an anomaly when they are successful in school, (c) encouraged to pursue a lesser skilled job that is more "realistic", and (d) perceived as all the same (Harper, 2009; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Kennedy, 2002),

5. Black women are in "double jeopardy" (Beal, 1969) when they encounter both racism and sexism on campus (Everett et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2013; Shorter-Gooden, 2004)

6. Black student have their "personal and/or group experiences and beliefs discounted" in the classroom (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 71),

7. Black students attend classes where the racist assumptions held by White students are kept intact in the classroom by an instructor who "fails to disrupt the master narratives through their teaching practice" (Hubain et al., 2016, p. 387), and

8. Black students experience segregation within shared spaces on campus due to macro-level microaggressions (Hardwood et al., 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017)

Consequently, Black students have shown to have increased levels of stress that negatively impacts their mental and physical health (Carroll, 1998; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Pierce, 1974; Primm, 2018). For instance, it has been established that Black students suffer from both stereotype threat and racial battle fatigue while in college.

In brief, stereotype threat is the "the fear of confirming the stereotypes that others have regarding a group which they are a member" (Gilovich, Keltner, Chen, & Nisbett, 2013, p. 444). Stereotype threat is a self-evaluative threat that comes about when one risks conforming to the stereotypes that others have about a group they identify with (Solórzano et al., 2000; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat can activate physiological and psychological stress responses in the body. This specific stress is described by Smith (2004) as racial battle fatigue (RBF). In detail, RBF is defined as:

[T]he increased levels of psychosocial stresses and subsequent psychological (e.g. frustration, shock, anger, disappointment, resentment, hopelessness), physiological (e.g. headache, backache, "butterflies," teeth grinding, high blood pressure, insomnia), and behavioral responses (stereotype threat, John Henryism[2], social withdrawal, self-doubt, and a dramatic change in diet) of fighting racial microaggressions in MEES [mundane extreme environmental stress]." (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, p. 68)

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[2] John Henryism is the "strong behavioral predisposition to cope actively with psychosocial environmental stressors" (James, 1994, p. 163).

Along with stereotype threat and RBF, it has been found that Black students also experience "onlyness" as the result of racism on campus. According to Harper (2011), onlyness is the "psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group" (p. 190; also see Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2012, 2013).

Furthermore, aside from mental and physical health outcomes, it has been reported that enduring racist stereotypes in the classroom results in lower academic performances among Black students, particularly Black men (Harper, 2009; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007; Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen, 2016; Solórzano et al., 2000). As further explained by Harper (2009), "Black male undergraduates could focus more on achieving academically if they did not constantly encounter racist assumptions in college classrooms regarding their intellectual inferiority" (p. 709; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Fries-Britt, 1997; Smith et al., 2007). Lastly, confronting racism on campus can engender a greater sense of invisibility (Franklin, 1999; Haynes et al., 2012; Hubain et al., 2016), silencing (Haynes et al., 2012; Domingue, 2015), and "perpetual homelessness" for Black students on White campuses (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017).

As has been illustrated in this section, confrontations with racism can be detrimental for the Black body, as well as disadvantageous for the educational success of Black students. Nonetheless, as the following section of this chapter will demonstrate, Black students are seeking out ways to navigate racism that takes place within White spaces on campus.

Racism Response Strategies

Drawing from Lewis, Harwood, and Huntt (2013), I will present the racism response strategies that were offered in the current literature in three sections: (1) Resistance Strategies, (2) Collective Strategies, and (3) Self-Protective Strategies.

Resistance Strategies

According to previous research, Black undergraduate students who strive to disrupt racist ideologies on their campus utilize a variety of strategies both inside and outside of the classroom. For example, Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) found that the Black honors students in their study felt pressured to (a) work harder on challenging the stereotypes and myths about Black students and (b) prove their academic worth and abilities. They did so by "behav[ing] in ways that are considered non-Black, involv[ing] themselves in events so that they could serve as a positive example of Blacks, and prov[ing] that they were not accepted into the Honors program because of affirmative action" (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 515; see also Bonner , 2010; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Fries-Britt et al., 2010; Harper, 2012; Moore et al. al, 2001; Strayhorn, 2009).

In particular, the students in Fries-Britt and Griffin's (2007) study illustrated how they displayed their bicultural abilities as a way to navigate White spaces on campus (see also Cross, Smith, & Payne, 2002; Ferguson, Ludwig, & Rich, 2001; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Payne & Suddler, 2014; Shorter-Gooden 2004). For instance, one student noted that she switched the way she communicated depending on who was around as a way to demonstrate her range of speaking ability, while another student would sing Mozart in Latin in her residence hall community shower to prove that "Blacks have

behaviors and abilities that are 'normative' and like everyone else (Whites)" (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 516).

Another resistance strategy presented in past research was the notion of resisting the internalization of racist assumptions, which was demonstrated by the Black men in Harper's (2009, 2012) studies who "decided against responding in or waiting until hours later to reflect on a racist encounter" (Harper, 2012, p. 12). Instead, their objective was to "make the perpetrator do the work of confronting their own assumptions and biases" (Harper, 2012, p. 12). In other words, by confronting the comment rather than the person, the Black male students forced their White peers "to examine their own misconceptions about Black men" (Harper, 2009, p. 707).

For example, when a Black male student was assumed to be an athlete by a White peer, he responded: "I'm not even tall, so what made you assume I was on the basketball team?" (Harper, 2012, p. 12). By doing so, the students in the study "became skilled at simultaneously embarrassing and educating their peers through the thoughtful act of calmly questioning their misconceptions" (Harper et al., 2012, p. 12). This approach is similar to other studies which found that undergraduate students on White campuses, who understood the power of their own, actively (and verbally) addressed microaggressions (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2005; Harper, 2007; Lewis et al., 2013). Lastly, the final resistance strategy discussed in the literature demonstrated how Black female students embraced their natural hair and body figure as a way to resist the Eurocentric beauty standards that are maintained in White spaces at PWIs (Lewis et al., 2014).

Self-Protective Strategies

Generally speaking, self-protective strategies are "inactive strategies used to minimize the stressful cumulative effect" of a traumatic event (Lewis et al., 2013, p. 63). In their study that examined how Black female students at a PWI responded to gendered racism (Essed, 1999) on campus, Lewis et al. (2013) found two self-protective coping strategies that are worth noting. The first was identified by a group of Black female students in the study, who claimed that they desensitized themselves and sought to escape as a way to cope with the gendered racial microaggressions they experienced on their White campus (Lewis et al., 2014). Thus, it was concluded that "becoming desensitized and escaping" was an intentional way for the Black women to reduce the distress of confronting gendered racism, as well as a strategy to maintain their mental health and wellness (Lewis et al., 2014).

Furthermore, in Lewis et al.'s (2013) study, it was discovered that Black female students strived to become "Superwoman" as a "way to exemplify strength and resilience" (p. 64). To provide clarity, Lewis et al. (2013) stated:

> This form of coping is unique to the sociocultural and historical experiences of Black women and has embodied the notions of independence, strength, and self-reliance as a way to maintain agency in the face of environmental barriers based on race and gender. It also represents a strategy whereby Black women try to protect themselves by re-defining the negative stereotypes projected onto them from the dominant society by trying to show that they are capable of persevering in the face of adversity. (p. 64)

What is interesting about the previous strategy is that it appears to mirror Moore,

Madison-Colmore, and Smith's (2003) concept of the "prove-them-wrong syndrome."

In their study, Moore et al. (2003) determined that in response to encounters with

racist stereotypes in their engineering programs, the African American male students in

their study "developed coping mechanisms that manifested into positive vigor" (p. 67).

For example, "[r]ather than passively ignoring the adversity, in the sense of their

thoughts, feelings, and actions, the African-American males assumed a more assertive

academic posture and a stronger sense of purpose, commitment, and confidence in their

academic persistence and performance" (Moore et al., 2003, p. 67). Therefore, it was

concluded that the African American male students were able to "work harder in reaching

their goals while, at the same time, 'proving their critics wrong' when they doubt their

ability to perform" (Moore et al., 2003, p. 70).

Collective Strategies

In the past two decades, a great deal of research has been conducted on the use of

collective support for Black students who attend any predominantly White school in the

U.S. (e.g., Brooms & Davis, 2017; Griffin & Allen, 2006; McAdoo & Crawford, 1999;

O'Connor, 1997; Palmer & Gasman 2008; Payne & Brown, 2010; Tatum, 1997), with a

good portion specifically focusing on college student (e.g., Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002;

Harper, 2007, 2009, 2015; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2006; Patton & McClure,

2009; Solórzano et al., 2000). Although familial support and religion and spirituality have

been found to have considerable influence on the overall college experience of Black

students at PWIs, nevertheless, this section will mainly focus on the significance of peer

support within counter-spaces.

According to Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000), counter-spaces "serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70). Counter-spaces that have been recently studied are: Black student organizations (Harper, 2015; Harper & Quaye, 2007), Black fraternities and sororities (Harper, 2007, 2015; Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005; Mitchell & Gibson, 2015; Solórzano et al., 2000), Black cultural centers (Patton, 2006; Payne & Suddler, 2014; Richards, 2017), summer bridge programs (Harper, 2013), Black Male Initiative Programs (Barker & Avery, 2012; Brooms, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Brooms, Goodman, & Clark, 2015; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Zell, 2011), and Black support groups (Black, 2018), to name a few.

The utilization of Black counter-spaces have been determined to be an effective strategy for Black students who experience a hostile racial campus climate (Harper, 2012; Lewis et al., 2013; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000). Accordingly, counter-spaces are vital for the academic survival of marginalized students who are "familiar with their groups' voices being silenced in the classroom discourse or with having their personal and/or group experiences and beliefs discounted" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 71). Therefore, by taking advantage of counter-spaces, Black students can "foster their own learning and…nurture a supportive environment wherein their experiences are viewed as important knowledge" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70). More importantly, through peer teaching, Black students can help socialize incoming Black students on how to productively navigate their White college or university (Harper, 2013).

Summary

To summarize, prior research has presented how Black students who attend PWIs experience racism on campus. Additionally, it has considered the negative consequences that enduring racism has on the mental and physical well-being of these students. However, few studies were found that deeply explored the response strategies of Black undergraduate students who seek out ways to navigate the racism on their White campuses. As a result, we know little about Black students who manage to successfully navigate their ways in college, despite the barriers that are in place for them to fail (Harper, 2010). Accordingly, we know even less about what Black students take away from their racialized experiences in college. Therefore, the current study seeks to create a space where these discussions take place.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Site of Research

Mid-Atlantic University is a four-year public research university that is recognized for its urban campus and the racial and ethnic diversity of its student body. Mid-Atlantic University is the home to a little over 30,000 students, 24,000 being first-year and transfer undergraduate students. Mid-Atlantic University's student population is made up of roughly 12% international students, 33% racial/ethnic minority students, and 49% women.

Participants

For the case study, purposive sampling was utilized to recruit study participants. The target population for this study was Black undergraduate students who attend Mid-Atlantic University. Exclusion criteria for the study sample were students who were under the age of 18, non-Black populations, former Mid-Atlantic University students, first-semester students, and students with no prior experience with racism on campus. I targeted students who had at least one semester at Mid-Atlantic University because it was assumed that these students had a more considerable amount of exposure with navigating White spaces on campus compared to incoming first-year or transfer students who had just arrived on campus two weeks before the recruitment phase of the study (September 2018).

A total of 12 Black undergraduate students at Mid-Atlantic University participated in the current study. The age of the participants in the study ranged from 18 to 22 years, with a mean age of 21 years. The participants were well distributed across the

various colleges at Mid-Atlantic University. There were disproportionately more females (n=10) in the study than males (n=2).

Recruitment

To recruit participants, I used an online search tool to identify predominantly Black student organizations on-campus. The presidents of these organizations were contacted via email, and each president was asked to forward the attached recruitment flyer to the members of their organizations or chapter members. Flyers were also placed in various buildings around Mid-Atlantic University's campus. After the first nine interviews, the remaining three participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

All participants in this study were recruited from Mid-Atlantic University. This setting made it possible to conduct in-person interviews, in a public or private location selected by each participant. For the ten participants who emailed me directly to indicate their interest in the current study, I replied by thanking them for expressing their interest in the research and forwarded them the link to the online demographic questionnaire. This step was not utilized for the two participants who indicated their interest by initially completing the questionnaire. After each of my 12 participants completed the demographic questionnaire, an interview date, time, and location were determined.

Data Collection

To collect data for the current study, I relied on a pre-interview questionnaire and an in-person interview. The online questionnaire was used to collect demographic data (i.e., pronouns, gender, age, ethnicity, major/s, and minor/s), participants' previous experiences with racist encounters on campus, and possible times and dates for an in-

person interview (see Appendix D). To protect the privacy of the study participants, limited demographic data will be provided in Chapter IV.

I conducted 12 semi-structured individual interviews between September 2018 and October 2018 (see Appendix E). I recorded each interview using the Voice Memos audio recording app on my cellphone and the QuickTime Player audio recording software on my password-protected laptop. The duration of the interview meetings was between thirty and forty-five minutes. While pre-determined questions were asked, depending on my participants' experience, additional topics unfolded and were also discussed during the interview.

Data Analysis

Findings from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed to find major themes that helped to highlight *what* my participants revealed about their experiences at Mid-Atlantic University during the interview. In-vivo coding was also utilized since I was interested in centering the experiential knowledge of my participants (Cooper, 2018; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Referencing Roulston (2010), I used data reduction, categorization of data, and reorganization of the data into thematic representations by hand. I did so by (1) reading over each transcript multiple times, (2) coding data to find consistent words and phrases also found in the literature and (3) keeping detailed notes in the margins of the transcripts. Additionally, "[f]acial expressions, body movement, and nonverbals were also considered as part of the dialogue" (Jones et al., 2002, p. 27). Once the data were organized, I compared the data to existing theories and research (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). As a result, I uncovered recurring themes that answered the two research questions in this study.

Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research

To ensure that the current study was carried out in an ethical manner, this study was submitted and approved by the Mid-Atlantic University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in August 2018 (IRB # 18-0246). As indicated in my IRB, I sent a letter of informed consent to my participants via email to review before the interview meeting to allow for any questions about the nature of the study. At the interview meeting, we discussed research consent and each participant signed the informed consent form. As outlined on the consent form, each student participant received a $20 compensation for their participation. A copy of the signed form was emailed to each participant within 24 hours after the interview took place and the physical copy was shredded using a personal shredder. All data were saved under a pseudonym and stored in two locations: (1) my Mid-Atlantic University Google Drive and (2) a password-protected file on my H-Drive under a pseudonym. Once the audio recording of each student's interview was uploaded to my password-protected laptop, each record was deleted from my cellphone.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations within the case study due to its design. First, the demographic make-up of my participants was limited and was not the best representation of the following students:

1. Black male students and students who are gender non-conforming,

2. Students who are perceived by society as being Black but identify as African or bi-racial/multi-racial,

3. Students who do not participate in student organizations or Black Greek life,

4. Non-traditional undergraduate students, and

5. Black graduate and professional students.

Additionally, the time frame of the thesis (September 2018 to February 2019) limited the data received. If more time permitted, I could have spent a more extended period observing my participants, building rapport, and strengthening the depth of the data collected.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

This qualitative research study was geared towards getting a better understanding of the experiences of Black undergraduate students at Mid-Atlantic University. The two research questions that guided this study were: (a) *What strategies are Black undergraduate students at Mid-Atlantic University using to respond to racism on campus? (b) What do Black undergraduate students at Mid-Atlantic University see as the main takeaways from their confrontations with racism on campus?*

As stated in Chapter I, analyzing racial microaggressions considers the (1) type of the microaggression, (2) context of the microaggressions, (3) reaction to the microaggression, and (4) response to the microaggression. While during various sections of the data presented below, all four factors may be revealed; yet, it is essential to keep in mind that the purpose of the study was to investigate the racism response strategies employed within White spaces on campus. Therefore, more attention was given to how the Black students in the study responded to the racial microaggressions they came across.

Each Black student that is introduced below was given a pseudonym in an effort to protect their identities. Additionally, all residence halls shared by my participants were also given pseudonyms. The findings in this chapter will be offered in three sections: (1) Encounters with Racial Microaggressions on Campus, (2) Racism Response Strategies, and (3) Main Takeaways.

Encounters with Racial Microaggressions

TABLE 1: Pre-Interview Questionnaire Data Results

Questions	N=12	%
I've been asked to represent my entire race during a class discussion	6	50.00%
I've been asked to educate the class on topics concerning race or Black culture	9	75.00%
I've been asked how I was able to perform academically well on an exam, paper, or assignment	3	25.00%
I've been suspected of cheating in the classroom because I was able to perform academically well on an exam, paper, or assignment	1	8.33%
I've been asked how a person like me got into MAU	2	16.67%
I've been silenced or ignored in the classroom	7	58.33%
I've been excluded from in-class peer groups	3	25.00%
A faculty member or peer has voiced their assumption (without any evidence) that I come from a low-income neighborhood or attended an under-resourced school prior to MAU	4	33.33%
I've been called by another Black person's name in the classroom even though there's no resemblance	9	75.00%
I've been asked if I sell drugs or know where to find drugs	2	16.67%
I've been asked if I can dance or if I can teach someone to dance	9	75.00%
I've been assumed to be an athlete	6	50.00%
I've been assumed to be knowledgeable about hip-hop/rap music, trends, and jargon (slang)	9	75.00%
I've been accused of being "angry" or "aggressive" when I spoke up on an issue during a class discussion	11	91.67%
I've been accused of being loud	5	41.67%
I've been accused of being threatening	0	0.00%
I've been accused of being sassy	9	75.00%
I've suffered from stereotype threat while attending MAU	7	58.33%
I've suffered from racial battle fatigue while attending MAU	5	41.67%
At least one of the above encounters caused stress in my life	8	66.67%
At least one of the above encounters made being a student more challenging	7	58.33%

Racism Response Strategies

Like most incoming first-year students at Mid-Atlantic University, Jade (Female) lived on campus in a residence hall. As she explained:

> *I stayed in Carolina Hall and these White guys lived next door. And so, they were blasting this country music--not that I have anything against it--but it was like 12 a.m. So, this one time I pound on his [one student's] wall, so he turned it up louder. So, he finally turned it off and then before he left to go, he pounded on my wall and my [picture] frame fell down. He did it just to be spiteful.*

As the White male student was leaving his room, Jade approached him and said something on the lines of*, 'Did you think that was cute?'* As they were going back and forth, the White male student exclaimed, *'Go to bed, nigger'* and walked off. After collecting herself, Jade went back to her room, wrote a note, and posted it on his door and the following day she reported the incident to her resident advisor (RA). When she was asked if the student was drunk at the time that he made the comment, Jade asserted: *No, he knew what he was doing. [Later on], he was just like, 'My roommate's Black, I would never.'*

Like Jade, Cavalo (Male) also encountered racial incidents in his residence hall his first year at Mid-Atlantic University. As he recalled, Cavalo and his two Black male friends were returning to Virginia Hall one night. While standing outside of the residence hall doors, Cavalo was in the process of pulling out his student ID card to swipe into the building. Within *no less than five seconds*, a White female RA appeared at the door and *had the nerve* to ask if he and his friends lived there. With his student ID card in hand,

Cavalo responded with, *Excuse me?* and the RA proceeded with the same question, *'Do y'all live here?'*

This frustrated Cavalo because why else would he have his student ID card out to swipe into the building if he was not a resident? Even though Cavalo wanted to express his anger at the moment, he reminded himself that getting *out of character [was] a waste of energy*. Instead, he decided to reach out to another RA about the situation:

> *I didn't feel comfortable talking to any of the other White RAs 'cause like [they] don't understand. And I talked to one of them on my floor and I asked, 'Are there any Black RAs that I can talk to about this situation because...?' She was like, 'What's the situation?' I was like 'You won't understand because you don't go through it.'*

Luckily, Cavalo ended up finding a Black male RA who helped him out, but unfortunately, after that episode, he began to notice more of these incidents happening on campus.

During his interview, Cavalo also emphasized the issues he had with his White professors. He noted that while he is comfortable around most of the people in his program, however, he runs into problems when taking courses outside of his major. For example, in one of his non-major elective courses, Cavalo noticed that his grade was going from a B to a C and he was concerned that it would continue to lower throughout the semester. He equated this drop in his course grade with the fact that he was working two jobs that semester.

At the end of class one day, Cavalo asked his White male professor if he could work around his office hours since they conflicted with Cavalo's work schedule. His

professor responded: *"Oh, no, if you can't come to the office hours, I can't help you."* Soon after, a *student of a different race* asked the professor the same question and the professor's response was: *"Oh yeah, we can work something out! Just email me."* Once again, Cavalo wanted to *act out*, but decided to leave it alone. *It was just stuff like that that they don't really care if you pass or fail,* Cavalo asserted. When asked to clarify who "you" was, Cavalo stated that he was referring to Black students. He further elaborated: *They [White professors] don't care. Even when you ask questions, they look at you like, 'Why is he asking a question?'*

"Leaving it alone" was also a strategy employed by Hannah (Female), who recalled an incident that took place at the beginning of Fall 2018 semester with a White male professor in her department. On the first day of class, Hannah's professor went down the list of students and called out everyone's first and last name. Noticing that her last name was the only one that was not said, Hannah decided to approach her professor at the end of the class to talk to him about it. As she explained:

> *So after class I was talking to the teacher. I was like, 'Yeah, I noticed that when you were calling roll, you didn't say my last name and I just find it weird that you didn't like, you know, it's [her last name], if you didn't know how to say it, if you didn't know what it was.' And he's like, 'Ohhh, is that African?' And I'm like 'Yeah it is!' And he's like, 'Oh, so where are you from?' I'm like, 'Oh, I'm from [country].' And he's like 'Ohhh, you don't sound [ethnicity].'*

With nothing more to say to her professor (but really thinking to herself '*I don't got time for this*'), Hannah left the classroom that day to never return. While this incident was not the sole reason why Hannah ended up switching out of the class, however, it did

influence her decision. While we were able to laugh about the situation together in the third-floor stairwell of the student union, Hannah's facial expressions still imitated her sheer disbelief of the comment of her professor.

Madeline (Female) also had some run-ins with one of her professors in a course that she was currently enrolled in. Having had this professor the previous spring semester (Spring 2018), Madeline assumed and hoped that this professor would finally call her by the right name. Nonetheless, the issue carried over, and Madeline started to get more agitated as the semester went along. During both the previous and current semester, Madeline corrected her White female professor multiple times, but for some reason, it seemed as if this professor refused to call her by the right name. Ironically, when calling roll, the professor would say Madeline's correct name, but any other time, she would refer to her by a completely different name. Eventually, Madeline started ignoring her professor*: I started doing what my kids do. My kids in school, if you don't say their name right, they are gonna start ignoring you. I was like, 'Let me try this.'* When asked if this strategy worked, Madeline asserted that her professor does not say her name anymore:

> *She just don't say it. She sat down and she had like an open apology to the class. She was like, 'You know, it's important for me to know your names. It's important, but just know I don't know my own kids' names.' And I was like, that has nothing to do with me. I'm not your child. And the thing is, she knows everybody else's [name in my class] and I'm the only one that you can't know my name?*

Another incident illustrated by Madeline took place with a White female student who made the comment one day in class that she wanted "*a little Black" in her but only because she "want[ed] to have curly hair*." The White female student pulled out her

cellphone and proceeded to show Madeline a picture of her biracial (Black and White) friend who had *3B hair* and light complexion. Madeline's response to the White female student was: *'So you mean to tell me that you want the benefits of being Black but don't want to look Black and don't want the oppression with it?'* Rather than having an open discussion about the comment, the other White female classmates voiced that it was best to change the subject. *But at first*, Madeline continued, *they were all agreeing with her, like, "Oh yeah, I like that, like I wish I had that."* While these situations left Madeline frustrated and sometimes unmotivated, nonetheless, she perceived them as moments of opportunity to teach her White classmates who will one day be responsible for teaching Black children.

Likewise, when a White classmate made an ill-considered comment, Deuce (Male) preferred to respond with questions to get a better sense of *why* the comment was made. By asking questions such as, *Why do you feel that way?* or *What have you experienced personally that makes you feel that way?* Deuce rationalized that he is *getting to the root* of the problem. J.K. (Female) also voiced that she also used questions to direct racism in the classroom. She expressed that when a White classmate makes a racist comment, she would repeat the comment in the form of a question in hopes that the student would ask themselves, *Did I just really say that?* and then come to a conclusion on their own about *how inappropriate it was for [them] to say that out loud.*

Outside of asking questions, addressing racist comments with an explanation was also revealed in the students' stories. Mia (Female) was the first to give insight into how this approach worked. She shared that during one of her Spring 2018 courses, her professor split the class into random groups. Without going into much detail, she

mentioned that her group consisted of all White students expect for her and a Black male student. As her group members started working on the assignment, Mia was taking a moment to *process everything before contributing to the group discussion*. As the other students were conversing, one White male student in the group commented to the other White students: *"Oh yeah, they aren't going to do any work."* Mia responded: *'Hold up, wait, who's not doing any work?'* The White male student went on to explain that Mia and the other Black student were not saying anything or participating. She continued:

> *I'm like, wait, he's [the Black male student's] over here saying stuff and filling out information.' I'm just like, no. No. Then he was just like, "Well sorry if I offended you or anything, that's how most of them are." I'm like, 'Most of who are?' He was just digging himself in deeper. I just said, 'Ok, well, let me explain this to you: most of who?' And I was just trying to let him know like, 'You can't just come off and say stuff like that because you don't know how somebody else is going to react. Because my reaction isn't the same. Because he [the other Black person] could've just blew off the top and started going off on you.'*

In the same manner, Sarah (Female) felt it was *just better to educate stereotypical comments and ideas. It's better to just educate it versus just getting mad and like mouthing off because usually mouthing off leads to the furthering of the stereotype*. In agreement with Sarah, when approached with a question that has an underlying racist assumption from a White friend, Mariah (Female) liked to respond with: '*This is what it means. This is why we do it. But you know, I'm going to answer it like this, but somebody else might not, so next time, don't say it like that.*' She found this to be a *better approach* because she contended that *a microaggression cannot be responded to with aggression. It*

has to be responded to like, 'You know what you just said. This is why it made me feel this type of way.' She further elaborated:

> *A lot of people (pause). We're in the south and I have friends who don't have any Black friends--that's wild to me because I have a lot of White friends--but, I feel like you can't get mad at someone because they don't know, but you can get mad if you tell them and they continue to not care. So as long as I inform them, then I know, I feel like I did my part in teaching someone else about something they weren't open to. I think that when I hear my friends like, 'Oh I cursed her out' or 'I just ignored her,' like that doesn't improve anything. And you can't want a more understanding world if you aren't gonna help other people understand….Of course, if you have multiple occurrences with someone then it's different because they just don't care.*

Like Mariah, all of the students in the study at some point during their interview remarked that it was possible that some of their White peers were oblivious that what they were saying was wrong and hurtful, either because of their lack of social interactions with people of color prior to coming to Mid-Atlantic University or their racist upbringing. Even so, having this understanding did not make them any less woke or annoyed by the racist comments made by their White classmates and friends.

For example, Hannah voiced the difficulty of interacting with White peers who let their *White privilege* stand in their way of understanding the experiences of minoritized peoples in the U.S. (e.g., *minorities and students on the LGBT[QAI+] spectrum*). Therefore, she concluded that Black students need to learn to pick their battles because

sometimes it's just better to save your breath because bigger battles are coming. It's just not worth it. Educating every little Tom, Dick, and Harry isn't worth it.

Comparably, Deuce, who declared that he had a *good handle on how [he goes] about things*, also asserted that he realized that addressing racism with questions was a hard approach to take because sometimes a racial microaggression *comes from a deeply rooted hate for Black people and other people of color*. And regardless of how much he worked to find common ground with his White classmates, *some people [weren't] going to be helped and just gonna be stuck in their ways.* He continued:

> *It's nice to think that you can change this person or you can make the world a better place if you sit and talk, but the truth of the matter is, it's not. It's going to take way more than that, but I think it's still just a good start for me. It gets it off my chest.*

When asked if he sought out other ways to get his racialized experiences off his chest, Deuce replied:

> *I talk to my brothers about it. Usually, I'll just get in the GroupMe and be like, 'Y'all, guess what just happened in my class?!' And they'll voice their opinions because we're kind of a mixed, diverse group of guys and they'll say like, 'Oh yeah, something similar happened to me the other week, there's really nothing you can do.' He [one brother] was like, 'Just try to educate and do this, that, and a third,' or other brothers will be like, 'You have to do this or have to do that.' So, we discuss it, and we discuss main issues and stuff, but I feel that's a better venting process and a better way for me to get stuff out instead of just taking stuff internally and kind of thinking about it.*

This was echoed by Madeline, who shared that she only talked to two people out of her classes because *the rest of them are wild.* Being the only Black student in her program, her White female classmates look to her *for answers about everything that goes on or like they just say like weird stuff, you know, like, 'Oh, do you know, this song?'* Luckily, after becoming a member of a Black sorority on campus, she finally had other Black women to share her racialized experiences with: *I always tell my line sisters, like 'I never had people to talk to about my problems.' So now I be texting them all throughout class when I get angry (laughs).*

The need to share an experience with a same-race peer was also indicated by J.K. who stated:

> *If it [a racist incident] does happen, I really can't keep things to myself or inside, so I have to tell somebody about it. Whether or not I turn it into a joke or a serious conversation just depends on what exactly it was. But most of the time, I do tell someone about it. Maybe it's like, my best friend because we share a lot of views. She's Black too. Sometimes she can relate like 'Oh yeah,' or she has commentary. Or I tell my roommate. And sometimes we just laugh it off and then it's dead or sometimes it evokes a bigger conversation but I always, I always do tell someone about it. But it's always if I feel comfortable. And that person always looks like me because I feel like they can relate to me.*

Main Takeaways

During the duration of her time at Mid-Atlantic University, Demeter (Female) had the opportunity to *grow as a person and just develop as a Black woman*. Because of the racist (and arguably sexist) ideologies she encountered in the classroom, Demeter

proclaimed: *I have to work harder than Tim because I'm a Black woman and because of that, I've become a better programmer, a better person, [and] a better communicator.*

Jen (Female), who was also afforded the opportunity to develop as a Black woman, shared that as a first-year student, she did not know how to *stand up for [her]self* during racist class discussions. But she soon came to terms with the fact that if she did not say anything to counter the racist comments made by her White classmates, then *they would continue to happen*. Once she started speaking up, it was then that she realized how difficult it was going to be to disrupt the norms of a White, male, and conservative classroom:

> *The moment I raise my hand in class it automatically feels like a target [is] on my back (slaps hands). It doesn't matter what I say (slaps hands), I can say something about the weather today and they [White male classmates] would have something to say. So, to me, it made me feel like they were really against me like no matter what I say. I would always be in the wrong. But, yeah. It was just, it was shocking. It was just also an eye-opener.*

In spite of all that, Jen continued to use her voice. More importantly, she learned to reframe her experiences, which is elucidated when she expressed:

> *I feel like Mid-Atlantic University, although it has its flaws and I'm coming into situations that might not make me comfortable, I knew that that would prepare me for the real world and that would prepare me for corporate America. I want to be a corporate attorney; I'm gonna be surrounded by White men. That's my life. So, what better time to get used to it?*

Other students also voiced their anticipation for their racialized experiences at Mid-Atlantic University to help them navigate other White spaces beyond the confines of the university. When asked why she decided to stay at Mid-Atlantic University in spite of her incidents with racism on campus, Demeter explained that she will encounter racist comments regardless of where she is at: *Even after I graduate, this is a predominantly White world. This is a White man's world anyway, so I may as well get used to it now.* This was echoed by Hannah who asserted:

> *Well, you're going to find them [racist microaggressions] everywhere. America is a White space and I can't decide simply not to live because I'm constantly in White spaces. So being Black and stuff is learning to code switch and learning to deal with microaggressions that happen to me on a daily basis.*

To a similar degree, Lucinda (Female) commented that learning how to handle racist comments and behavior of White people is *like a growing type of thing for [Black] people* and without *just a hint of racism,* she does not think that she would be prepared to have a job working with and around White people after college.

Additionally, Deuce claimed that he would prefer to *go through these microaggressions and these things now in college and learn how to deal with them than getting into the real world and just going out thinking, 'Oh, nobody's racist' and then somebody makes racial remarks*. He later expressed:

> *I feel staying in [city] and going through those [racist] experiences makes me a better person and that's another reason that I came to this school. Just to better myself…I can definitely say I wasn't the same person [coming into Mid-Atlantic University as] I am now. I definitely wasn't as level-headed. I was very fast at the*

mouth poppin' off like, 'You're not just about to sit here, dadada.' But those

experiences have definitely changed me and made me a better person and I've

seen it. I've definitely seen where I was and where I am now.

Throughout his journey at Mid-Atlantic University, Deuce also learned how to avoid internalizing the racist comments made by his White classmates. How did he do it? By simply not sitting around and dwelling on them. His mantra was:

I'm not going to re-live hate and re-live this experience. I mean they've already

said it. It's already done. You know how that person is. You know how they were

raised. Just chop it up to 'They're ignorant' and keep it pushin'.

Finally, Hannah, like Deuce, understood this notion of just "chopping it up," when she shared:

My parents really instilled in me knowing who I am and they made me think I

could do anything. And I still think I can do anything, so stereotypes were just

that: stereotypes. They weren't fact. They weren't anything that really should be in

your way of, you know, getting your education. And I mean, obviously you hear

things like, you know, 'Oh you only got in here 'cause you're Black, yada, yada,

yada, yada, yada yada.' All that affirmative action noise and what not. But at the

end of the day, [I'm] here. At the end of the day [I'm] doing what [I'm] doing,

and I think I deserve to be here just as much as anybody else.

Summary

In this chapter, it was found that Black students at Mid-Atlantic University confronted a variety of racial microaggressions during their undergraduate career both within the university's residential living communities and the classroom setting.

Nonetheless, it was also discovered that by (a) employing strategies to counter the racial microaggressions they encountered on campus and (b) cognitively reframing their racialized experiences into positive takeaways, the Black undergraduate students in this study were well-equipped with the tools necessary to navigate the racism they confronted on their campus. In the next chapter, I will discuss these main strategies that were utilized by the Black students in the study and use them to make recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

As discussed in Chapter II, there is limited research that addresses the racism response strategies of Black undergraduate students who attend predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S. The 12 students in the case study all have different backgrounds, with vastly different educational and career goals in mind. However, there were commonalities amongst the way they navigated their university. The most significant, collective similarity in their stories were the strategies employed to respond to the racism they encountered on their White campus. The data collected as part of this case study supported the current literature that claimed that Black undergraduate students who attend a PWI employ response strategies as a way to navigate their White campus. Below, I will address and connect the research findings with the previous research. While doing so, I will also offer my recommendations for future research.

Resistance Strategies

The most prevalent resistance response strategy that emerged in the data was using one's voice as power. It was revealed that the Black students in the study did so in three ways: (1) reporting racism that happened in the residence hall, (2) addressing racism with questions, and (3) addressing racism with explanations. These strategies were congruent with the findings presented in past research. Though, what was not mentioned in the literature, but was shown in the findings of this study, was using silence as a form of resistance.

It can be argued that Madeline's refusal to answer to her White female professor is parallel to the behavior of the Black men in Harper's (2009) study who "refused to be niggered." The only difference is that the men in Harper's study used on-campus

engagement in mainstream and Black student organizations to challenge the racist stereotypes of their White administrators, professors, and peers whereas Madeline used her silence as a way to defy her White professor's microinvalidation. Nonetheless, "being niggered" is only used in the context of Black men. So, what does this mean? Is there a possibility that the concept of niggering can be expanded to incorporate the experiences of Black women? Or is there a different term that can be used that consider the historical and cultural oppression that Black women have endured in America? Such as the term "Mammified," indicating that Black women are expected to comply and respond to White individuals regardless of the way they are being treated? (see Dumas, 1980; Harris, 1982; Hill Collins, 1991, 2000; Omolade & Carty, 1996; Williams, 1995). Of course, more research is needed to make such claims, which is why I recommend for future scholars to consider how the intersectional experiences of Black students who attend PWIs in the U.S. might influence the racial microaggressions they come in contact with.

Self-Protective Strategies

In the study, only two students utilized self-protective strategies to help them navigate racism on campus. As Hannah explicitly stated, she believed that picking one's battles was the best way to navigate a predominantly White campus. She demonstrated this by deciding to leave the classroom without directly addressing her professor's comment about her (lack of) accent. Lewis et al. (2013) found that picking one's battles for the Black women in her study involved:

> making cognitive decisions about the best way to deal with a gendered racial
> microaggression based on the context of the situation, particularly when a Black

woman was in a situation where she may not have power or may not know how to actively do something about the situation. (p. 60)

While it was not for certain if Hannah avoided addressing her professor because of the unequal power dynamic between her and her professor (e.g., professor/student, White/Black, male/female), but what is evident is that Hannah's felt as if she did not have the time (both mentally and physically) to deal with her professor's comment. So to do what was best for her at the moment, she decided not to confront her professor's ignorance and carried on about her business.

Furthermore, Cavalo also demonstrated employing self-protective strategies during two different situations: the incident with the female RA and the one with his male professor. For instance, by standing by his decision to not get out of character in front of the White female RA because it was a "waste of energy," revealed that Cavalo already possessed a deeper understanding of how (un)productive a conversation with a White female student about her racist behavior was going to be in the long run. Also, the presence of Cavalo's two Black male friends could have influenced his decision to not actively respond at the moment if he felt like he was putting them at risk of being another victim of racial discrimination by campus police. Therefore, he decided to adapt by addressing his concerns with a Black RA. Overall, it can be concluded that Cavalo's actions were an attempt to (a) physically and mentally protect and shield himself and (b) minimize the stress that would have most likely occurred if he would have attempted to address his perpetrators.

Collective Strategies

Lastly, as revealed in Chapter IV, counter-spaces as a collective racism response strategy were utilized by numerous students. Interestingly though, these spaces did not serve the same purpose for every student. To be more specific, for Deuce, his group messaging board functioned as a Black counter-space where he sought the assistance of his fraternity line brothers as a way to help him navigate racist incidents in the classroom. The use of a social media platform, GroupMe, was a mechanism to use of peer pedagogies, which is the teaching "about the realities of predominantly White colleges and universities, as well as how to respond to most effectively to racism, racial stereotypes, and microaggressions they are likely to encounter in classrooms and elsewhere on campus" (Harper, 2013, p. 208). Additionally, within this virtual space, Deuce was able to vent about his experiences to people who also shared similar experiences with racial microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000). In the same manner, this was the reason why (1) Madeline texted her line sisters during class about the behavior of her White female classmates, (2) J.K. shared her racialized experiences with other Black students in her circle, and (3) Cavalo intentionally went on the hunt for a Black RA (since there were not that many) to share his concerns with.

Because counter-spaces served as an essential coping mechanism for the Black students in the study, I argue that future research should examine the relationship between Black counter-spaces and the racism response strategies that Black students employ in the classroom. Harper's (2012a, 2013) work and my findings not provided in this thesis uncovered that some Black students are applying the racism response strategies in the classroom that they have picked up from interacting with their peers of color within

counter-spaces. If this is true, understanding the significance of peer racial socialization and peer pedagogies needs to be further explored to understand how to prepare incoming Black students who might need assistance with navigating a White campus.

Moreover, I recommend that researchers use a linguistic anthropological perspective when seeking to understand the relationship between counter-spaces and racism response strategies. Thus, this perspective will not only reveal what is being said between Black students but *how* they are saying it. For example, do Black students use a non-standard English language variety to relay their messages to their peers? Are they placing more emphasis on certain words? What is their body doing as they are sharing this information? Are they sharing their cultural knowledge via storytelling? These are some questions that are vital to consider because it can lead to a better understanding of the communicative norms of Black students that might be rooted in cultural practices. Having this information can be used to help PWIs communicate with their incoming Black students.

Main Takeaways

In brief, two main takeaways were illustrated by the Black undergraduate students in the study. First was the notion of never backing down, which was elucidated in the stories shared by two female students, who kept persisting towards their goals regardless of the *noise* around them that was telling them otherwise. The second takeaway, preparation for the future, was illuminated by five students, who believed that their previous and upcoming experiences with racism on Mid-Atlantic University's campus would prepare them for their bright futures.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was twofold: first, to explore the racism response strategies of Black undergraduate students who attend Mid-Atlantic University and second, to uncover the main takeaways from their confrontations with racism on campus. In this study, I have showcased the lived experiences of 12 Black undergraduate students who did not let their encounters with racism on campus hinder them from continuing to pursue their degrees. By illustrating how they worked to navigate Mid-Atlantic University's campus, the Black students in the study are evidence that Black students *are* capable of rising above the racist ideologies that are perpetuated, nurtured, and reified at a PWI. More importantly, by sharing their stories with humor, passion, and pride, it can be said without hesitation that the Black students in this study embodied the true essence of Black resilience.

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APPENDIX A: Examples of Racial Microaggressions
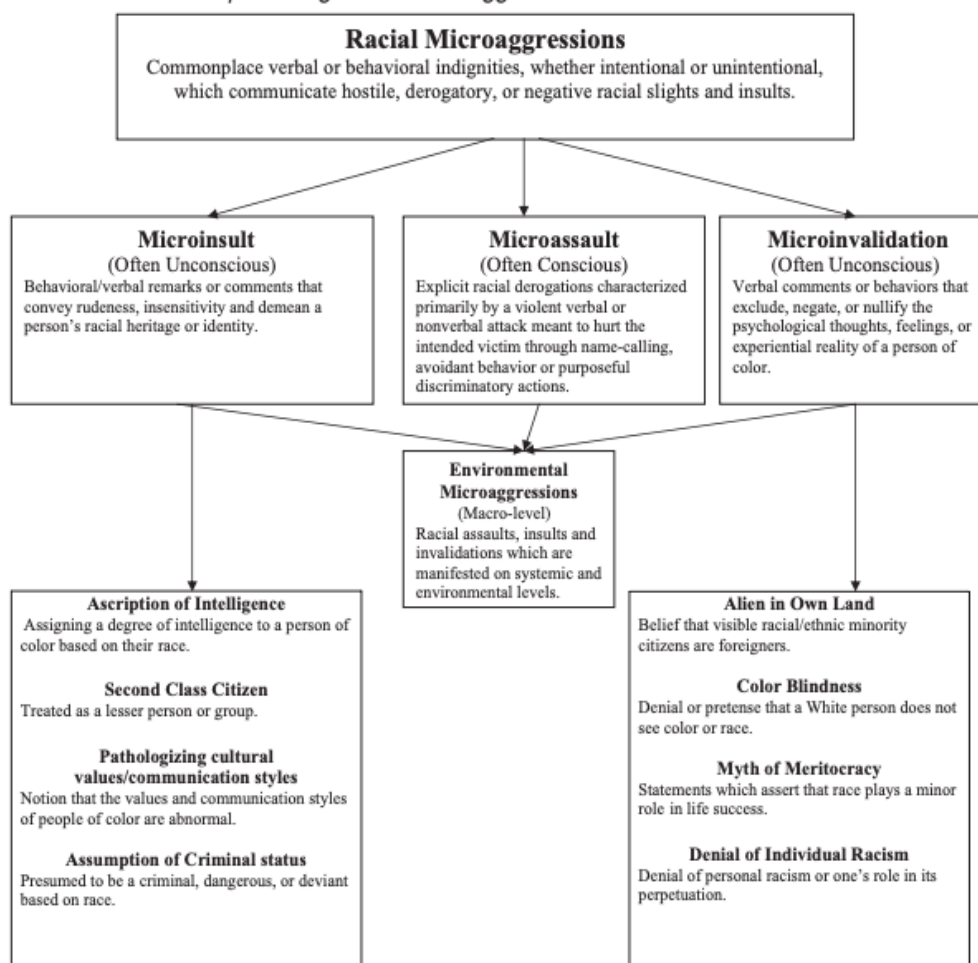
Table 1
Examples of Racial Microaggressions

Theme	Microaggression	Message
Alien in own land When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born	"Where are you from?" "Where were you born?" "You speak good English." A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language	You are not American. You are a foreigner.
Ascription of intelligence Assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race	"You are a credit to your race." "You are so articulate." Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem	People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent. All Asians are intelligent and good in math/sciences.
Color blindness Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race	"When I look at you, I don't see color." "America is a melting pot." "There is only one race, the human race."	Denying a person of color's racial/ ethnic experiences. Assimilate/acculturate to the dominant culture. Denying the individual as a racial/ cultural being.
Criminality/assumption of criminal status A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant on the basis of their race	A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes A store owner following a customer of color around the store A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it	You are a criminal. You are going to steal/ You are poor/ You do not belong. You are dangerous.
Denial of individual racism A statement made when Whites deny their racial biases	"I'm not racist. I have several Black friends." "As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."	I am immune to racism because I have friends of color. Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can't be a racist. I'm like you.
Myth of meritocracy Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes	"I believe the most qualified person should get the job." "Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."	People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race. People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.
Pathologizing cultural values/ communication styles The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal	Asking a Black person: "Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down." To an Asian or Latino person: "Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal." "Speak up more." Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting	Assimilate to dominant culture. Leave your cultural baggage outside.
Second-class citizen Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color	Person of color mistaken for a service worker Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger	People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn't possibly occupy high-status positions. You are likely to cause trouble and/ or travel to a dangerous neighborhood.

Table 1 (*continued*)

Theme	Microaggression	Message
Second-class citizen (*continued*) Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color (*continued*)	Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer behind you "You people . . . "	Whites are more valued customers than people of color. You don't belong. You are a lesser being.
Environmental microaggressions Macro-level microaggressions, which are more apparent on systemic and environmental levels	A college or university with buildings that are all named after White heterosexual upper class males Television shows and movies that feature predominantly White people, without representation of people of color Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color Overabundance of liquor stores in communities of color	You don't belong/You won't succeed here. There is only so far you can go. You are an outsider/You don't exist. People of color don't/shouldn't value education. People of color are deviant.

APPENDIX B: Categories of Racial Microaggressions

Figure 1
Categories of and Relationships Among Racial Microaggressions

Racial Microaggressions
Commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults.

Microinsult
(Often Unconscious)
Behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity.

Microassault
(Often Conscious)
Explicit racial derogations characterized primarily by a violent verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions.

Microinvalidation
(Often Unconscious)
Verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color.

Environmental Microaggressions
(Macro-level)
Racial assaults, insults and invalidations which are manifested on systemic and environmental levels.

Ascription of Intelligence
Assigning a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on their race.

Second Class Citizen
Treated as a lesser person or group.

Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles
Notion that the values and communication styles of people of color are abnormal.

Assumption of Criminal status
Presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant based on race.

Alien in Own Land
Belief that visible racial/ethnic minority citizens are foreigners.

Color Blindness
Denial or pretense that a White person does not see color or race.

Myth of Meritocracy
Statements which assert that race plays a minor role in life success.

Denial of Individual Racism
Denial of personal racism or one's role in its perpetuation.

APPENDIX C: Racial Microaggressions and Student Interpretations

Appendix B

TABLE 2   *Examples of racial microaggressions, with participant interpretation of meanings*

Microaggression reported by participants	Participant interpretation of microaggression
"What sport do you play?"	Black men are on campus for sports, not school
	All Black men are athletically gifted
	The only way Black men access college is through sports
"You got weed?"	Black men are drug dealers and/or users
	Black men know how and where to find drugs
"You got that new Weezy?"	Black men are knowledgeable about hip-hop music, trends, and jargon
"Teach me how to Dougie."	Blacks are wonderful entertainers
	Black men are gifted dance instructors
"How'd you get in here?"	Blacks are only admitted through affirmative action target programs with lower admissions standards
	Black men do not deserve to be at highly selective institutions
	Black men are not competitive college applicants
"You wrote this?"	Black men who write well must have cheated or plagiarized
	Black men are intellectually incapable of producing quality academic work
	Black men are academically dishonest
"Hello, [other Black guy in the class]."	All Black men look alike
	Key differences between Black men are insignificant
"You from the hood?"	All Blacks are from low-income, high-crime neighborhoods

APPENDIX D: Pre-Interview Questionnaire

1. **Do you identify as Black?**

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

2. **Are you a current undergraduate student?**

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

3. **Are you 18 or older?**

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

4. **Have you completed at least one semester at Mid-Atlantic University?**

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

5. **Have you had at least one encounter with a racial stereotype on campus at Mid-Atlantic University?**

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

6. **First Name**

   _____

7. **Last Name**

   _____

8. **Preferred Name**

   _____

9. **Pronouns**

   _____

10. **Gender**

   _____

11. **Age**

   _____

12. **Ethnicity**

_____

13. Current Major(s) and Minor(s)

_____

14. Mid-Atlantic University Email

_____

15. Pseudonym

_____

16. Please Select all that apply

☐ I've been asked to represent my entire race during a class discussion

☐ I've been asked to educate the class on topics concerning race or Black culture

☐ I've been asked how I was able to perform academically ell on an exam, paper, or assignment

☐ I've been suspected of cheating in the classroom because I was able to perform academically well on an exam, paper, or assignment

☐ I've been asked to how a person like me got into MAU

☐ I've been silenced or ignored in the classroom

☐ I've been excluded from in-class peer groups

☐ A faculty member or peer has voiced their assumption (without any evidence) that I come from a low-income neighborhood or attended an under-resourced school prior to MAU

☐ I've been called by another Black person's name in the classroom even though there's no resemblance

☐ I've been asked if I sell drugs or know where to find drugs

☐ I've been asked if I can dance or if I can teach someone to dance

☐ I've been assumed to be an athlete

☐ I've been assumed to be knowledgeable about hip-hop/rap music, trends, and jargon (slang)

☐ I've been accused of being "angry" or "aggressive" when I spoke up on an issue during a class discussion

☐ I've been accused of being loud

☐ I've been accused of being threatening

- ☐ I've been accused of being sassy
- ☐ I've suffered from stereotype threat while attending MAU
- ☐ I've suffered from racial battle fatigue while attending MAU
- ☐ Other_____

17. In your opinion, do you think the above encounters would have happened if you were White?

- ☐ I prefer not to answer
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Other_____

18. Did any of the above encounters cause stress in your life?

- ☐ I prefer not to answer
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

19. Did any of the above encounters make being a student more challenging?

- ☐ I prefer not to answer
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

20. Do you think you would have the same experiences at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HIS) or a Historically Black College and University (HBCU)?

- ☐ I prefer not to answer
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

21. Do you think you would have the same experiences at a different PWI?

- ☐ I prefer not to answer
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

22. What three qualities do you think a resilient person has?

_____

APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol

Participant pseudonym:
Date of interview:

Interview Questions	Notes
SECTION I: Background	

• Please tell me about where you are from
    o What was the demographics of your town/city?
    o What was the demographics of your grade schools?
• Please tell me about your decision to attend Mid-Atlantic University
    o Why did you want to attend college?
    o Why did you choose Mid-Atlantic University?
• Before attending Mid-Atlantic University, what were your expectations?
• What has been your overall experience so far at Mid-Atlantic University?
• Did you know that MAU was a PWI before attending?
    o If so, did it matter?
• How was your transition to college?
    o Were there any immediate challenges that you faced?
• Are you involved in any student organizations/clubs/fraternities/sororities?	

SECTION II: RACIAL ENCOUNTERS	
 • When you experienced any of the racial microaggressions that you indicated in the questionnaire, can you recall what your initial reaction was? What immediately came to mind?	

○ At that moment, how did you respond?
       ○ After you stepped away from the situation, what did you do?
       ○ Did you reach out to someone or a group of people about this situation?
            ▪ If so, who?
• If you were going to experience a racial microaggression tomorrow, would you use the same strategy or would you do something different?
• Even after these racial experiences, why did you decide to stay at Mid-Atlantic University?
• What helps you stay motivated?	

SECTION III: INTROSPECTION	

• Have you learned anything from these experiences?
       ○ If so, what?
• What is the hardest part about having to experience racial microaggressions?
• How did you make it so far in your education despite the racial stereotypes you've encountered on campus?
• What do you plan on doing after you get your degree?
• On the questionnaire, I asked what three qualities you think a resilient person has. You listed […]. Do you think you embody these qualities?
       ○ If so, why?	

SECTION V: Closing	
• Do you have anything else you would like to add? • Do you have any questions for me?	