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A Post-Racial Era?

The Campus Racial Climate for Multiracial Undergraduates

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Abstract: Multiracial undergraduates are coming of age when assertions of a post-racial era claim the post-civil rights multiracial population as its proof, which is part of the socio-historical context of the campus racial climate. Given that campus racial climate research has been silent about multiracial students, the purpose of this study is to explore multiracial undergraduates' perspectives of the climate. Interviews of fourteen undergraduates at a public university in the western United States reveal the prevalence of multiracial microaggressions in the campus racial climate, indicating both a negative racial climate for most and evidence against claims to a post-racial society. Educators are encouraged to incorporate multiraciality into existing curricula, programs, and other educational avenues that already address matters of race and racism in U.S. contexts. Future analysis must also explore variation within the multiracial climate and why some students may experience a more negative climate than others.

Introduction

Despite centuries of interracial mixing in the United States during the pre- and post-civil rights eras, multiracial college students in the United States are coming of age at a time in which the ascendancy of our first African American President, Barack Obama, has been used to suggest that the U.S. is moving into a “post-racial” era. Media debates the idea that Obama is a post-racial icon because he, *as a mixed race individual*, has the ability to (and does) successfully appeal to people from many racial backgrounds (Carroll, 2008; Rodriguez, 2008). Media reveals norms in the current racial ideology that assume mutually exclusive monoracial racial categories, preference for monoracial identity (if not colorblindness altogether), and ascribe post-racialism to being mixed race; these constitute an aspect of the present socio-historical context of the campus racial climate for college students. Additionally, the Census 2000 for the first time allowed individuals to indicate more than one racial background (Root, 2003). Although only 2.7% of the total population marked more than one racial category, a large proportion of those under the age of 18 did so (Renn, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), and by 2050, 21% of the U.S. population is projected to follow suit (Root, 2003). These demographics indicate generational growth in a post-civil rights era population that acknowledges mixed racial ancestry, many of whom have already passed through institutions of higher education. Although empirical studies explore multiracial college student experiences as they address elements *related* to the campus racial climate, no studies to date specifically assess the campus racial climate for multiracial students.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explore multiracial undergraduates’ perspectives of the campus racial climate. The following research question guides this work: How do mixed race students perceive and experience race in the college environment? Who to

consider multiracial is another question, given that a large proportion of the U.S. population has mixed ancestry from centuries of interracial mixing, particularly within African American, Latina/o and Native American groups (Fishkin, 1995; Gomez, 2007). In addition, many students with mixed racial ancestry may identify and/or be exclusively classified into singular racialized groups like Arab, Asian, Black, Latina/o, Native American, White, etc. (see Renn, 2004). For this study, I define being multiracial as having biological parents who represent two or more racialized groups in the United States, and I acknowledge that examinations of multiraciality within singularly racialized groups are unfortunately beyond the scope of this study.

Importantly, the distinction between *racial* and *racialized* in this study is one attempt to not reify 'race' in an essentialist sense (see Renn, 2004), but rather highlight racial formation as a social construction (Omi & Winant, 1986/2007). Despite these limitations, the terms multiracial, mixed race, and biracial will be interchanged to refer to the population as defined.

Aim of highlighting the racial climate for multiracial students are to both document it, and to welcome monoracially-defined communities into a discussion about how we may partner in improving the climate for these students in a way that also supports monoracial-identifying students and their respective ethnic communities. I must emphasize that the goal is to bring awareness and develop ally relationships amongst communities to better support all students and groups members. How multiracial students are positioned in the post-racial discourse affects the larger racial landscape. Educators must continue to examine the racial climate when post-racialism de-legitimizes the validity of race as a concept, asserts that racism no longer exists, and uses the post-civil rights multiracial population as its evidence. Given that higher education has the potential to prepare students to effectively engage in our increasingly diverse society

(Hurtado, 2007), we must take this complex population into thoughtful consideration and critically examine how race is being deployed today.

Relevant Theory and Research

Racial Formation and Multiracial Identity Theory

This study theoretically understands race as a social construction with real consequences for lived experience (Omi & Winant, 1986/2007), and affirms multiple patterns of mixed race identity (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004) in capturing students' perspectives of the racial climate. Understanding race as a social construction, the college environment can be seen as a context in which race is formed and constructed. Racial formation theory might reason that multiraciality is an artifact of the current racialization process, that is, it is a response from within the current paradigm that challenges understandings of "races" as separate biological or social entities. It also highlights that society has yet to figure out how to meaningfully interpret and respond to the shifting racial landscape. Given the social, political, and economic forces understood to shape race, this theory asserts that race still plays a role.

Multiracial identity theory (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004a) complements racial formation theory by conceptualizing multiracial identity in the college population from an ecological perspective, and by recognizing that mixed race college students identify racially in five patterns that are not mutually exclusive. These include one monoracial identity, two or more monoracial identities, a multiracial identity, opting out of racial categorization, and/or identifying situationally (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004). Additionally, physical appearance, cultural knowledge, and the fluidity of the college peer culture consistently influence how multiracial students racially identify (Renn, 2008). The theory also suggests that these students may occupy very different spaces on campus based on how they identify. Furthermore, college campuses that

have a critical mass of multiracial students willing to organize around race, as well as a non-rigid campus culture, also have higher rates of students who identify situationally (Renn, 2003, 2004); these may be potential components of a more amenable campus racial climate for multiracial students, as they indicate both a safe space to express a multiracial identity, as well as fluidity and freedom to move within and between monoracial groups. Together, these two theoretical frameworks inform how I understand and gauge the campus racial climate from the perspective of mixed race students.

Campus Racial Climate

The campus racial climate is a conceptual framework that provides a way of assessing the quality of the college environment from students' perspectives that can inform educators interested in improving practice for student success. The five dimensions of the climate include the historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, the structural or compositional diversity of the institution, the psychological dimension, the behavioral dimension, and the organizational dimension that embeds privilege for some groups in institutional processes (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998, 1999; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). The climate framework situates the college environment within contemporary socio-historical and policy contexts, and the interactive dynamics between the five dimensions and the broader contexts is essential to understanding the complexity of student experiences.

Campus racial climate research utilizing monoracial categories indicates that students experience unique interactions based on racialized group membership (Harper & Hurtado, 2007), and that the climate is related to a number of educational outcomes including cognitive, socio-cognitive, values and attitudes, and competencies for citizenship in a multicultural world (Hurtado, et al., 2008). Harper and Hurtado's (2007) synthesis of climate literature shows that

studies cluster around students' differential perceptions of campus climate by racialized group, racial/ethnic minority student reports of prejudicial treatment and racist campus environments, and benefits associated with campus climates that facilitate cross-racial engagement. However, students indicating more than one racialized background are often categorized in the least represented group for quantitative analyses, a research practice that is incongruent with how many mixed race students identify (Renn, 2008; Talbot, 2008). Even so, this literature paints a general picture of the climate, its role in producing educational outcomes, and provides a strong foundation for addressing the lack of research on the campus climate for multiracial students. Although not explicitly focused on the racial climate, literature on multiracial students indicate distinctive experiences pertaining to their racial identity and being mixed race in college.

Multiracial Microaggressions

Multiracial microaggressions are a prime example of racialized experiences that hinge upon being mixed race (Johnston & Nadal, 2009, 2010; Museus, Lambe, Robinson, Knepler, & Yee, 2009). The term *microaggression* is used to indicate racial aggression on the micro/interpersonal level, and is not an indicator that an act or interaction is slight or minimal in its degree of aggression, but rather can have cumulative negative effects on mental health (Pierce, 1995; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Additionally, some multiracial microaggressions also occur on the structural or systemic level and may be invisible to the perpetrator or recipient (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Multiracial microaggressions “involve individual’s mixed-heritage status and are experienced by multiracial persons of any racial makeup or phenotype” (Johnston & Nadal). In effect, they reveal ways in which mixed race people disrupt normalized monoracial notions of race and racism, or *monoracism* (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). The nature of multiracial microaggressions theoretically suggests that there is some privilege in belonging to a monoracial

group, even if that is a racial category of color (Johnston & Nadal, 2009, 2010; Museus, et al., 2009). Accordingly, multiraciality poses a challenge to academic theory regarding race, racism, power, privilege and oppression while simultaneously highlighting that racism still exists, but perhaps in additional forms that were previously not considered. Although multiracial microaggressions have been documented in the literature, they have not been analyzed regarding how they constitute or contribute to the campus racial climate. Multiracial microaggressions can be understood as manifestations of the interactions between all dimensions of the campus racial climate and external contexts, and are most clearly indicative of the psychological and behavioral dimensions, although these do interact with the other dimensions. Two similar taxonomies detail this phenomenon (Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Museus, et al., 2009).

Johnston and Nadal (2010) identify five overarching categories of multiracial microaggressions, each with sub-themes. The categories include: 1) *exclusion or isolation* based on being mixed race; 2) *exoticization and objectification*, 3) *assumption of monoracial or mistaken identity*; 4) *denial of multiracial reality* in which one is restricted from choosing their own racial identity; and 5) *pathologizing of identity and experiences*, wherein either is viewed as deviant from the norm. Many of the sub-themes are evident in the eight categories Museus, et al. (2009) generate in their study of multiracial college students and alumni. Multiracial microaggressions often revolve around racial identity, and are played out in social and structural environments in which race and racial realities are constructed. As such, it is nearly impossible to divorce multiracial identity development and racial formation from perceptions and experiences of the campus racial climate for these students.

Multiracial Undergraduates' Experiences in College

Another body of qualitative research reveals a nuanced understanding of multiracial college students' perceptions and experiences that can be understood in relation to monoracism and multiracial microaggressions. At the interpersonal level, some mixed race students do not feel accepted by their monoracial peers (King, 2008; Nishimura, 1998; Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004; Sands & Schuh, 2004), and may struggle with social integration in informal peer interactions (Sands & Schuh, 2004). In particular, multiracial students may find navigating campus spaces challenging due to others' perceptions of them based on their physical appearance, cultural knowledge, and how they act (King, 2008), as these are measured against monoracial norms. Regarding formal institutional practices, mixed race students may find monoracial-dominant student affairs programs to be limiting spaces (Sands & Schuh, 2004), as the lack of private and public space that is both psychological and physical may even lead to considerations of leaving the institution (Renn, 2000). Although these studies do not explicitly assess the campus racial climate, they describe negative racial climates, reveal outcomes that should be of concern for this group of students, and imply that institutions can play a role in improving educational practice.

Some scholars have included multiracial students as group in quantitative analyses as well, and confirm that race is clearly a factor in their college experiences. Biracial students reported the most experience with prejudice, compared to their Black and White peers at a single institution in the South (Brackett, et al., 2006), indicating a hostile and racialized environment likely steeped in monoracism and multiracial microaggressions. Furthermore, in a national study mixed race students indicated the lowest perceptions of institutional support, even after increases in interactions across difference, and indicated the second lowest levels of supportive relationships on campus of all racial groups (Kellogg & Niskode, 2008). This again draws attention to the importance of exploring multiracial student's educational experiences, as well as

institutional practices that may render these students invisible and inadequately served (Kellogg & Niskode, 2008; Ozaki & Johnston, 2008; Renn, 2008; Talbot, 2008). On the other hand, first-year mixed race students indicated a higher level of sense of belonging than other groups of students of color, and a lower level than White students; it was related to perceiving residence halls as being academically supportive and indicating a smooth social transition (Johnson, et al., 2007). Accordingly, it is important to take institutional context into consideration when analyzing the experiences of multiracial students, as these studies differ in their findings; however each reveals taxing college environments.

Cumulatively, research on multiracial college students reveals that race is very much a part of their lives on interpersonal and structural levels, which suggests that neither they nor society are post-racial. In fact, studies reveal the current racial formation being dominated by monoracism, as multiracial students are still seen as challenging contemporary racial ideology, which can generate negative experiences. Although this brief review alone refutes the assertion of a post-racial society, an analysis of the campus racial climate for mixed race students is needed to inform how institutions may address race more inclusively and improve educational practice across multiple dimensions. This study will contribute to existing knowledge about the experiences of this emerging population, suggest how to improve the campus racial climate in light of their experiences, and will further challenge the notion that we live in a post-racial era.

Methodology

I explored how mixed race college students perceive and experience the campus racial climate using a qualitative semi-structured interview research design (Creswell, 2003). One-on-one interviews allowed for in-depth storytelling of individual's lived experience, and are appropriate for this topic given the great ethnic and racial diversity within the multiracial

population and in our ways of identifying racially (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008). I assumed that this diversity may lead to different perceptions and experiences of the campus racial climate, as is the case for monoracial students with different backgrounds (Harper & Hurtado, 2007), so wanted to create a safe space for students to tell their potentially differing stories. I employ a phenomenological approach, “in which the researcher identifies the ‘essence’ of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in the study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). This is an appropriate strategy given that the research questions are about particular lived experiences as they relate to race in college (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). As a researcher who identifies as multiracial, Hapa, at times Latina, and who specifies having Pilipina, Mexican, and White ethnic and racial backgrounds, I constantly reflected upon my own racial identity (and other group-based identities) as well as my undergraduate experience at a small, predominantly white, selective Christian liberal arts college. I was mindful that my lived experience might differ from those of the participants, especially at a different place and time.

Undergraduates were recruited at a large public university in the western United States using indirect solicitation through email and flyers, as well as snowball sampling (Creswell, 2003). In order to include a wider range of mixed race students than would be expected for a study on race, namely students who have mixed racial ancestry but do not identify *as* multiracial and for whom race may not be as salient, participants were offered a ten dollar gift card incentive, and were recruited on the basis that they could ‘check’ more than one of the following racialized categories: Asian American, Arab American, Black, Latina/o, Native American and White. One-on-one, semi-structured interview data along with a brief demographic form were collected in 2010. The interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed using NVivo. Inductive

and deductive coding allowed for themes to emerge from the data as well as to locate these themes within dimensions of the campus racial climate.

In monoracial terms, Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students comprise the largest proportion of the undergraduate student body at the research site, followed closely by Whites, a modest percentage of Latina/os, less Black/African American students, and finally very small numbers of Native Americans. Arab, Persian, and multiracial identification were not reported. This site was chosen because no racialized group comprises the majority of the student population, it has a multiracial student organization, and is located in a racially diverse region of the country. I assume these factors may create a more neutral or positive environment for multiracial students contrary to the aims of the study, and thus an ideal space to explore the campus racial climate as the significance of race is being contested on a national level.

Fourteen students comprise the sample, and were from diverse racialized backgrounds including Asian American, Arab American, Black, Latina/o, Native American, Persian, and White, and span the five multiracial identity patterns documented by Renn (2000, 2003, 2004). Participants indicated lower, middle, and upper class socioeconomic backgrounds, and all had at least one parent who had attended some form of postsecondary education, but parents of three students had not earned a college degree. Participants included eleven women and three men, ages eighteen to twenty-five, with a range of majors. Half were in their second to fifth year at the institution, and the other half were in their first year at the institution, two of which were junior-level transfers. Finally, no participants were involved in the multiracial student organization. Participants chose pseudonyms in the interview process that will be used throughout the findings.

Limitations

Although this study inserts multiracial student voices into the literature on campus racial climate, it has limitations. Methodologically, it would benefit from a more robust study design such as a case study to tap into other dimensions of the campus racial climate. Although this is an analysis of the campus racial climate, this paper does not examine participants' direct evaluations or conclusions about Public University and how those may or may not conflict with their account of their experiences. It would also benefit from a more in depth analysis of students' racial identity development and other social identities, and how they may impact their perspectives of the climate and awareness of racial tension and divisions. Despite these limitations, it provides insight into how multiracial students experience race in college.

Findings

“... I've felt marginalized as a Latina person, or woman, before, but literally the past few months I've felt more marginalized as a multiracial person.”

– Theresa, Latina and White

Multiracial students at Public University perceive and experience race as a monoracial social construction and mostly indicate a poor campus racial climate in terms of being mixed race. Their accounts of college experiences are not devoid of race or racism, nor do most indicate a neutral racial climate as would be assumed if the U.S. were truly in a post-racial era. Rather, their experiences in college exhibit a normalization of monoracial categories, which is seen through the prevalence of multiracial microaggressions (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). The data for the present study verify all five of Johnston & Nadal's (2010) themes, as well as all sub-themes. The most prevalent multiracial microaggressions at Public University are *exclusion and isolation* by the sub-themes of *endorsement of a monoracial society and norms* and *questioning authenticity*, the *assumption of monoracial or mistaken racial identity*, and the *denial of*

multiracial reality. I discuss the findings thematically and demonstrate how multiple dimensions of the campus racial climate interact to create these multiracial microaggressions.

Exclusion or Isolation: Endorsement of a Monoracial Society and Norms

Unfortunately, mixed race students and people can often be excluded from general conceptions of race and ethnicity, as well as interpersonally from their monoracial-identifying peers on the basis of being mixed. While this can be intentional at times, it is often unconscious and reflects the broader social assumption of ‘races’ as distinct categories of people. This is illustrated by Theresa, an eighteen-year-old female who identifies as biracial, as a Student of Color, as Latina, and who has Mexican and White backgrounds. She was raised by her White mother in a predominantly working class Black neighborhood. She recalls, “... in interracial dynamics class if we’re talking about race or something, I’ll make a comment about how the course reader has nothing about biracial/multiracial people or history or just like experience or anything....” This bothered her greatly, as she expressed that she knows that people of mixed heritage have played critical roles in social movements, have been subjected to racism and mistreatment, and that this information feels obscured and left out of courses that are meant to address racial issues. She knows monoracial communities of color have and are necessarily fighting to include those histories and scholars in the curriculum ‘canon.’ However, in attempts to educate and examine race, we see here that multiracial histories are often excluded from the knowledge base, which is part of the organizational dimension of the climate that can structurally privilege or oppress groups of people. Other examples from participants of programs aimed to improve the campus racial climate also unfortunately excluded or isolated multiracial students on a number of occasions on organizational and interpersonal levels.

Exclusion or Isolation: Questioning Authenticity

Another multiracial microaggression that was prominent for students at Public University was exclusion or isolation from monoracial groups through their questioning of racial authenticity based on their status as mixed race students (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Audrey talks about feeling like she must prove her authenticity to Black and White peers. She indicates Jamaican, Costa Rican and Irish ethno-national backgrounds, Black, Latina and White racialized backgrounds, and primarily opts out of identifying in racial terms by critically deconstructing race. Although most people identify her as Black, she no longer identifies with the Black community at her university, in part because of religious and political difference. Her reflections reveal how exclusion and isolation occur in the psychological dimension through attitudes that question her racial authenticity, and in the behavioral dimension via peer interactions:

‘... My last name’s O’Brien. How much more Irish do you want me to get? All my brothers and sisters have freckles.’ It’s like I’m trying to prove my Whiteness.... And then when I go to Black people, it’s like I have to prove that I’m Black.... And it’s like, ‘Oh, well, where did you grow up? In the suburbs?’ I’m like, ‘A good three years of my high school career I was in the suburbs...’ Like, ‘What!?’ So it’s like opposite. You’re always proving one to the other and it’s weird.

Audrey’s monoracially-identifying Black and White peers each question if she is authentically part of their group. Such exchanges also reveal the intersection of socioeconomic class in the construction of Blackness, where having lived in the suburbs is a marker of inauthenticity, despite that she indicates a predominantly working class background and perceives the Black community on campus to be mostly upper middle class. At the time of the interview, Audrey had removed herself from the Black community on campus that she had previously been a part of, shared experiences of racism from Whites and other groups that also perceive her as

monoracially Black at first glance, and was reevaluating who she associates with. Audrey's peers' questioning her racial authenticity painfully isolates her from either community and reveals a negative campus racial climate through the psychological and behavioral dimensions.

Although in-group considerations of who is 'in' and who is an 'other' are normal human process, they can be extremely damaging to those who consider themselves 'in' when the group indicates they are an 'other.' This calls for extremely difficult conversations in communities of color about racial subjugation, history, mixing, and belonging. Multiracial students pushed to the margins of some communities of color may be valuable members that shed light on the diversity of thought and experience within the larger group history. A slightly different way that some mixed race students are ascribed as in- or out-group members is seen in the next theme.

Assumption of Monoracial or Mistaken Racial Identity

Research has documented that multiracial people can be subjected to assumptions that they have only one monoracial background, and can be mistaken for a member of a racial group that they have no ties to (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). These assumptions first represent the psychological dimensions of the campus racial climate in that they reveal others' psychological conceptualization of race as a monoracial and static construct as well as one that can be determined base on physical appearance – that is, the immediate conceptualization of race in the U.S. is that of discrete, mutually exclusive groups largely determined by physical features. In essence it reveals a lack of space for other constructions of race, as well as a tendency to try to make sense out of someone who may not visibly fit dominant racial phenotypes. Assumptions flow into informal peer interactions in the behavioral dimension of the racial climate. An example of how this plays out in both dimensions can be seen in participants' reflections about

people's attitudes about mixed race. Wi, who is Native American and Arab but identifies solely by her Native American tribal affiliation shares,

Well, the attitude is always people are trying to figure out what you are, and I've talked to other people, like my other roommates who are mixed race about this, is that they're always placed in the wrong identity. I'm pretty sure people are always trying to figure out what the hell I am and I've heard everything from White, Latino, Asian. Just things like that, it's crazy and they'll never guess what I really am and the same with my other roommate. She's half White, half Native Hawaiian, but a lot of people think she's Mexican.... Or they don't even ask about those things. It's like, 'Well, I'm just going to assume you're this.' That's usually what it is, it's just an assumption or, 'You're Asian.' I think Natives assume I'm not Native... someone thought I was just White.

Evident in Wi's experience is both the assumption of a monoracial identity, as well as a mistaken monoracial identity. This indicates that the psychological dimension of the campus racial climate is both dominated by monoracial constructions of race, as well a lack of awareness by some about multiraciality altogether. In addition, Wi's peers exhibit a psychological conflation of race and ethnicity, and a racialization of ethnicities, as seen in the assumption that she and her roommate are sometimes assumed to be Mexican. Furthermore, the disregard for ethno-national backgrounds and identities for a preference of socially constructed racial categories is incongruent with how some of the participants identify, and conceals the ethnic heterogeneity amongst monoracial groups.

Another example that illustrates the assumption of a mistaken identity can be seen through Eric, who identifies primarily as Hapa and specifies Chinese, British, and Irish ancestry.

He shares about walking through an area of campus where student organizations often distribute flyers for events and group information:

... the Asian groups never flyer to me.... I've always wanted to see what their flyers look like, but.... Asian groups don't flyer to me and it's like, 'I'm Asian. Hi.' I will smile at them, I'll make eye contact, I'll start to reach out my hand and they're just like, 'Ooh. Oh, look an Asian person. Not you,' and it's like [in a disappointed tone], 'Oh, OK.'

The assumption made is that Eric is not Asian, and while we cannot be certain what his peers assume his racial or ethnic background to be, they inherently assume a mistaken racial identity, as Eric considers himself Asian and they do not based on his phenotype. This confirms that psychologically there is a construction of what 'Asian' looks like, and illustrative of the behavioral dimension, Eric is told through nonverbal interaction that he doesn't fit that mold. These two examples highlight how the assumption of monoracial and mistaken racial identities operate between the psychological and behavioral dimensions of a wearisome campus racial climate for multiracial students. While it may be challenging to identify some mixed race students' backgrounds based on physical appearance, educators can encourage students to invite peers from perceptibly different racial groups to events open to the campus, and to not exclude mixed race students from events explicitly designed to be safe spaces, should they attend.

Denial of Multiracial Reality

Lastly, multiracial people are denied a multiracial reality when others restrict them from choosing their own racial identity, often when they are already aware that the person has a mixed racial heritage (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). The data again clearly illustrate how this occurs in the psychological dimension of the campus racial climate that reflects peoples' attitudes and monoracial conceptions of race, and the behavioral dimension through interpersonal interactions.

The organizational dimension of the climate may also deny students of a multiracial reality when institutional practices do not facilitate or do not allow for multiracial identity patterns other than a single monoracial identity and opting out of racial identification.

To demonstrate the psychological and behavioral dimensions of the racial climate, I share Eric's reflections on his awareness of how he can be perceived racially. Earlier in the interview he had said, "Well, I look White," and so I asked him if that was his own opinion or if he had interpreted that from other people. Eric responded,

I think it's a mixture of both. I think it's something that I've internalized. Certainly when people...whenever they ask, 'Oh, what are you?' And I always say Chinese...you know, I get it from both Asians and White people who are like, 'Oh, I didn't know you were Chinese. I didn't even know you were Asian.' You know, if it's a group of people, they start arguing, 'No, of course you can tell he's Asian because of blah, blah, blah. Look at this,'...and then other people will be like, 'Well, I thought you were White, but maybe you could have been Italian.' And I was like, 'That is White.'

There are a multiple types of multiracial microaggressions in this one example, but I show them here for context as Eric shares why he initially said he thinks he looks White. Pertinent to the current theme is Eric's Asian friends trying to claim him as Asian; this is one aspect of denying him of a multiracial reality, as it sends the message that who claims you is more important than how you identify racially (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Secondly, the verbal expression of Eric's White friends trying to verify his monoracial Whiteness after he has said he is Chinese is an example of the denial of a multiracial reality, as it again locates the power to ascribe a racial identity within the monoracial group and takes it away from the multiracial person (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Furthermore, it reveals Eric's White friends' rationalization of trying to fit him

into some form of Whiteness that has changed status in history - that of being Italian, to justify their previous misconceptions without fully embracing that Eric also has a Chinese background. Eric later says that he thinks he looks Hapa, and that other Hapas are usually able to identify him in that way. Eric's example is illustrative of the psychological dimension of the climate and shows that his White peers cognitively reject Eric's claim to being Chinese in favor of the singular White identity they perceive, and follow it up behaviorally with assertions to confirm their interpretation of his racial identity. Additionally, his Asian peers use their membership in that monoracial group to legitimate Eric's Asianness. That Eric might be considered racially Hapa is affirmed mostly with his Hapa peers who demonstrate a psychological understanding of race that is inclusive of a multiracial identity. The interaction between the psychological dimension of the climate where a biracial identity is rejected and the behavioral dimension where the interaction takes place denies Eric of a multiracial reality, and although he comfortably asserts a Hapa identity, it has made him aware that many peers perceive him in a way that is incongruent with how he tends to racially identify. This can pose some challenges to monoracial peers regarding mixed race students' backgrounds, particularly when they identify with more than one. When done respectfully in a way that acknowledges the multiple identities the student identifies with, this microaggression can be avoided and replaced with a positive interaction.

An interesting example of how the denial of a multiracial reality unfolds in the organizational and psychological dimensions of the campus racial climate is seen in Katie's reflections on how racial data collection on her application for admission to the university differed from how it is used. The difference between racial identity, ancestry, or classification for data collection and usage is not clearly delineated in this case and likely adds to her frustration. Katie racially identifies solely as Hapa, but as that was not an option on the

application forms, she marked both White and Chinese backgrounds, only to have the institution re-classify her as Chinese:

...They messed up on my race ... they put me down as just one and that kind of bothers me, ... I don't identify with just one.... I checked both boxes for the application process and then somehow it just has me listed as one.... They just put me at Chinese and I don't think that they should automatically put me as the minority one. I think they should have just put 'other' or 'multiracial' ... I didn't know how they'd categorize me, but it's kind of annoying because I don't see myself in that way, so it's like just put me as 'other.'

Organizationally, the psychological conceptualization of race as a singular monoracial construct has been institutionalized in data usage, which denies Katie a multiracial reality. She had already told the university she has more than one racial background when given that option, but is not allowed both designations in campus systems. While singular monoracial identification would be congruent with some multiracial student's racial identity, many embrace two monoracial identities. However, in Katie's case, she has developed a multiracial identity, but indicates two monoracial categories on the admission forms given the racial classification options, only for the institution to then reduce that to a single monoracial classification.

This taps directly into concerns about how multiple race data will be counted, and if this will have bearing on civil rights legislation on the federal level (Renn & Lunceford, 2004), or how resources may be targeted on the institutional level. Katie's desire for a multiracial box opposes the stance the multiracial movement pursued for the Census 2000 in partnership with monoracial organizations, which advocated for checking more than one box but not having a multiracial box. Here we see the intersection of ancestry (check more than one) with identity (multiracial). How demographic prompts and questions are worded in data collection and

reporting is important for institutions and researchers to consider, and is not an easy conversation to have given the political contention around U.S. Census racial data collection and reporting.

Also illustrative a denial of a multiracial reality through the organizational dimension is Nadia's reflection about her upcoming graduation from the university, which also hints at the psychological and behavioral dimensions. Nadia is Guatemalan and Egyptian, identifies racially as Latina, Black, and biracial, and exhibits a situational identity pattern that shifts between two monoracial identities and a biracial identity. Her Egyptian side of the family does not identify as Black, but rather as Arab, and as African American only as a technicality, which she says has made her racial identification a bit more complicated than it would already be as a biracial student. She views the Arab identification as being a label that was intended to comparatively whiten Africans from Egypt, and claims the Black identity as a form of critiquing and resisting Whiteness. Nadia indicates that in the past, the graduation ceremony for Black students has been held at the same time as the graduation for Latina/o students:

So one of the biggest things that I'm kind of thinking about right now is graduation. I'm thinking I guess the African grad, but [literally] at the same time there's RAZA grad, and so hopefully they don't do that this year, but even thinking about something as small as that, which one do I attend or do I attend both or can I attend both and which is more important? ... I felt in situations especially like the graduation thing or where the [Latina] sorority took up so much time, I pretty much pulled away from the Black community where I was a lot more involved before, so yeah. ... For me, I think I'm the super involved type ... I think when it comes to actually having to choose between two different things makes me feel like I, I don't know, not, I don't know if the word is betrayed, I don't know if that's too strong of a word, but maybe I'm betraying one versus

the other and I'm not doing enough to identify with both.... It's always like 'Am I trying to choose one?' Or it's just part of the fact that there's too much to kind of try to consider, so it's easier to go this way or...you know what I mean?

Although Nadia is aware that she likes to be very involved, she indicates that it can be very hard to have to choose between being involved in her Latina sorority and the Black student community. This is particularly visible in her conundrum about which graduation ceremony to attend, as they have been held at the same time in the past. Organizationally, these important community-oriented graduation ceremonies are scheduled at the same time, and are separate, which denies Nadia a multiracial reality, and forces her to choose one over the other, especially given that she is involved in both. This also shows that racial attitudes (possibly amongst peers and/or staff) assume that members of the Latina/o and Black communities would be separate and not participate in or support each other's achievement, let alone that students might be both Black and Latina/o. In addition, the separate ceremonies held at the same time restrict interaction across monoracial groups on campus overall, an indicator of the behavioral dimension. It is likely that the psychological, behavioral, and organizational dimensions mutually reinforce one another in this instance, effectively denying Nadia of a multiracial reality. In this and similar situations, staff and faculty involved in ethnic organizations may support biracial students in checking scheduling, and may also encourage interaction amongst communities of color.

Discussion

Most students in this study detailed taxing experiences regarding race in college, although some recount a more heightened negative climate while others are less perturbed. Even so, their accounts revealed that they experience race monoracially, and are subject to

microaggressions based on being mixed race. The findings validate Johnston and Nadal's (2010) concept of monoracism and taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions, which are prevalent in the college environment and manifest across the psychological, behavioral, and organizational dimensions of the campus racial climate. This study reveals that exclusion or isolation through questioning authenticity and endorsement of monoracial norms, assumptions of monoracial or mistaken identity, and the denial of a multiracial reality are particularly prominent at this site. The findings demonstrate that race continues to be socially constructed in monoracial terms, although some mixed race students are embracing other racial categories such as "Hapa;" whether this becomes recognized by peers and society on a large level remains to be seen. Regardless, multiracial students do not appear to be disrupting the monoracial hierarchy by simply being, but rather bring to light that monoracial constructions of race *are* social constructions with real implications for lived experience. Although all people have the potential to challenge the racial system of privilege and oppression, simply being mixed doesn't do that by default, despite post-racial and essentialist-based hopes for mixed race people to end racism.

The campus racial climate (Hurtado et al. 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005) is a conceptual framework that can be used to evaluate multiracial students' experiences in college, and it is important to highlight aspects of the climate that are specific to this emerging population. This study identifies concrete examples of indicators of a negative climate specific to multiracial students. For these students, the psychological dimension of the campus racial climate includes the conceptualization of race, that is, the psychological manifestations of the social construction of race. In particular, when race is constructed in monoracial terms, this can create a less inclusive environment for these students and can ascribe a monoracial or mistaken identity, deny students a multiracial reality, and exclude them from monoracial group membership. The

behavioral dimension includes interactions, and as this study shows, many of those interactions revolve around multiracial students' racial identity, whether it is asserted, ascribed, or assumed. The psychological conceptualization of race complicates the behavioral dimension of the climate in that many interactions reveal peer's grappling with their understandings of race as they are confronted with multiraciality that challenges monoracial constructs. In addition, this study reveals ways in which multiracial microaggressions are manifest in the organizational dimension of the climate, showing that institutional practices reflect the psychological dimension through a monoracial conceptualization of race that has been implemented in practice.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

This study offers a number of implications for educational practice and research that aims to improve the campus racial climate through the reduction of multiracial microaggressions, as microaggressions have negative cumulative affects (Pierce, 1995). These climate indicators should be used in conjunction with monoracial measures so as to not remove these students from their respective monoracial groups, but rather to include them and offer a more complex analysis of their experiences. Although not detailed here, many of the students in this study also recounted monoracial microaggressions. As we continue to research and improve campus racial climates, it is important to keep this sometimes invisible and heterogeneous population in mind.

The findings of this study suggest that educators may play a role in improving the campus racial climate for these students in addition to singular racialized groups. Given that this study was conducted at a single site, it is important that educators assess the campus racial climate for multiracial students at their own institutions to determine site-specific needs. However, because this study does verify and confirm the taxonomy of multiracial microaggressions based in the literature, educators may pro-actively increase their awareness of

multiracial students, identity patterns, and the negative experiences they may have in the form of multiracial microaggressions as a first step towards improving the climate for these students. Second, educators can evaluate their own conceptualizations of race for potential bias and preference for the dominant monoracial categorization and incorporate reflection on racial formation into programming or advising for monoracial student organizations, orientation programs, curriculum and pedagogy, and other spaces where race is already a topic being explored with students. As educators incorporate multiraciality into formal training about race, racialization, and racism, it will be important to discuss the assumption of monoracial and mistaken racial identities that are often ascribed to mixed race students, as well as how student responses to assertions of racial identity and organizational practices like graduation ceremonies may deny students a multiracial reality. Administrators, student affairs practitioners, and faculty occupy powerful roles to pro-actively improve the climate for multiracial students, including educating their peers and other students. It will be important to strengthen allies and memberships within respective racial and ethnic communities to support all students developmentally and socially, as well as support and better understand political concerns around multiraciality within monoracial communities.

This study also has several implications for future research. First, further analysis of the data from this study and future research should explore how and why there seems to be variation within climate experiences for multiracial students, as some detail more negative experiences than others. This might include an analysis of microaggressions or privilege based on students' racial identities and identity patterns, as well as their respective monoracial groups, given that some are clearly perceived monoracially. This might address concerns about multiraciality challenging civil rights progress in a more nuanced and complex manner. Second, participants

expressed frustration and many times deep pain, none had yet looked into the multiracial student organization. Inquiry into practices that may mediate, improve, and foster an inclusive campus racial climate should be examined to tease out what is inclusive in terms of race and possibly other social identities. The data suggest that some experiences and practices may counter the negative racial climate for multiracial students; however, they must be addressed in another analysis, as this paper descriptively focuses on racial microaggressions in the campus racial climate. Third, future qualitative research would benefit from more robust study designs that incorporate observation and document analysis, or other forms of data collection to assess more fully the organizational dimension as well as the historical dimension of the campus racial climate; greater consideration should also be given to the compositional diversity in doing so. Future research should also examine the impacts of the socio-historical and policy contexts on the climate for these students. Fourth, identifying and creating a quantitative assessment that would measure the campus racial climate for multiracial students based upon existing and future qualitative research would help researchers and educators identify areas for improvement and practices that are mediating a negative climate at a larger scale, ideally regionally and nationally. Such an instrument must be able to capture both the racialized groups their biological parents' belong to, as well as how the student identifies racially and ethnically (Renn, 2004). In short, there is room for much campus racial climate research on multiracial college students that may also incorporate their monoracially-based climate experiences.

Conclusion

At a college campus that would have been a likely place for race to be less of an issue based on geography, its compositional diversity, and the presence of a multiracial student organization, this study does not reveal a neutral or positive racial climate for multiracial

students. Rather, it inserts an analysis of multiracial students' negative experiences into the literature on the campus racial climate alongside extremely important studies focusing on monoracially-defined groups, and identifies how multiracial microaggressions operate within and between several dimensions of the climate. Educators are in a position to improve the campus racial climate for multiracial students through education and reflection, support for similar research at their respective campuses, and pro-active implementation of interventions and organizational change based upon campus-specific analyses. In offering suggestions to improve the campus racial climate, this study refutes the post-racial assertion of multiraciality as the site of the end of racism, as we see these mixed race students experience multiracial microaggressions along multiple dimensions of the climate.

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