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**A Narrative-based Comparative Analysis of College Experiences Among
Racial and Ethnic Minority and Majority Students**

A Thesis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Students of color at predominantly white institutions often find it difficult to feel comfortable in spaces where they are a minority. As a student of color myself who attends Butler University, a predominantly white institution in Indianapolis, Indiana, I often experience this feeling of discomfort within social settings on campus simply because I am a minority. Navigating a community where one feels that they do not belong and frequently feels excluded from the majority can negatively impact students of color college experience particularly as compared with their white peers (Woldoff et al., 2011). The difference in perceptions allows for multiple realities with stark divisions of experiences between students of color and white students. For many students of color, attending a predominantly white institution is a culture shock thus leaving them to often question their belonging. This divergence spawns from different experiences of being a minority versus a white person within the United States. Minorities are usually more aware of the systems of oppression in American society such as systemic racism whereas white people have the privilege of being oblivious to most of these issues. These issues are a result of the unequal power relations within America. “This systemic and institutional control allows those ... who are white in North America to live in a social environment that protects and insulates us from race-based stress. We have organized society to reproduce and reinforce our racial interests and perspectives” (Diangelo 2015). Race-based stress affects people of color as it speaks to the unique psychological and emotional distress that they suffer as a result of discrimination and racism (ABCT). Because white people are protected from race-based stress, they may not be consciously aware of certain social and economic inequalities that occur from the unequal power hierarchy that they established. Sociopolitical issues such as the

unequal distribution and access to resources are a result of the systemic racism that was embedded within the foundation of America. This lack of understanding of how sociopolitical issues affect minority populations in the United States greatly influences the actions and behaviors of people when interacting with people belonging to a different racial identity.

At predominantly white institutions, students experience a miniature version of what exists in everyday life. The same racial biases and insensitive behaviors are able to occur as they do outside of the campus because, like the rest of society in the U.S., predominantly white institutions, historically, have not been inclusive towards different racial and ethnic groups. Originally, institutions of higher education were not designed to help people of color succeed in achieving an education. Students of color often have to adjust academically and socially in order to succeed at a predominantly white institution, which adds an additional challenge not faced by their white peers. Educational disparities within the nation disproportionately affect people of color, contributing to the underrepresentation of minority students at colleges and universities. Many of these higher education institutions do not take into account how these educational disparities in public education make it more difficult for students of color to easily adjust to the college experience (Woldoff et al., 2011). Students of color “attending [predominantly white institutions] not only face challenges academically but must also learn to adjust to an educational system that can seem racist and discriminatory, one that is “largely run by whites for whites” (Woldoff et al., 2011). These students are forced to navigate an education system that was “created by European American leaders and dominated by the white Western schools of thought” (Morrison, 2010). Because of this, it is difficult for some students of color to feel safe and supported while attending a predominantly white institution.

Previous research has shown that interracial friendships are often hard to form due to internalized prejudices possessed by white students about other racial groups. One study, for example, found that white students who reported interacting with Black students at their predominantly white institution “were found to have internalized negative beliefs about the Black community and Black culture in general, particularly accusing Blacks of self-segregating” (Woldoff et al., 2011). Due to such environments, students of color are less likely to feel welcome at these institutions, leading them to further socially isolate themselves from their white peers. The self segregation that occurs between racial groups is largely due to the “sociological concept of homophily, the principle that people tend to have more contact with similar than dissimilar others, including, but not restricted to, ethnically or racially similar others” and contributes to the limited interracial interactions at predominantly white institutions (Al Ramiah et al., 2014).

As a way to increase interracial interactions amongst students, it is important to increase one’s understanding about others’ perspectives. A way to expose people to others’ perspectives is through the use of storytelling and personal narratives. Through storytelling, a person listening to another person’s lived experience assists them in understanding the person’s perspective. Stories are able to evoke empathy allowing the audience to deeply connect with the storyteller, thus it can be useful in influencing relationships (Todd, 2011). Empathy “includes elements of perspective-taking such as imagining yourself in someone else’s situation, acknowledging their point of view, seeing things through their eyes, and trying to understand their emotional state and behavior” helping to create a connection “between the self and the outgroup” (Shaffer, 2019). Stories can be an effective tool in the pursuit of antiracism in that they encourage discussion, are more persuasive than statistics, and gain the interest of the listener (Polletta, 2006). Listening to

others' perspectives and experiences as a minority at a predominantly white institution has the potential to create an awareness of the discrimination that students of color feel while attending predominantly white institutions. This recognition of the discrimination and its affects on students of color is needed to become a better racial ally.

The goal of this paper is to analyze both stories and discourse around race on Butler's campus in order to create greater empathy and understanding of the experiences of students of color, foster conversations about race among students, and lead to greater racial allyship at Butler University.

2. METHODOLOGY

This project is part of a larger collaboration among four Butler students—me, [Braxton Martorano](#), Donald Crocker (who has since transferred), and Emily Fales—and our research mentor, Dr. Tom Mould. The project emerged from a First Year Seminar about the power of storytelling taught by Mould and taken by Martorano and Crocker. Martorano was interested in how stories could be used to improve racial allyship and interracial friendships on Butler's campus. Crocker soon joined the project and the students began preliminary research. Early conversations with the director of the Diversity Center at Butler, Dr. Gina Forrest, and the Special Assistant to the Provost for Diversity and Inclusivity (and now, Director of the Hub), Dr. Terri Jett, helped the team expand their scope to include the narratives of white students as well as students of color. In spring of 2021, Donald transferred and soon after, I joined the project. I was in Dr. Mould's FYS course that spring semester when Martorano came to talk to the students about the project he was working on. I immediately became interested and wanted to work on the project. In the Spring, 2022, Emily Fales heard about the project in another of Dr.

Mould's classes and joined the project as well, lending her video and design skills to the development of workshop materials.

The data for this project was obtained through qualitative research. Martorano and I interviewed students who are currently attending Butler University and were willing to share their experiences. It was important to talk to students belonging to many racial identities in order to accurately get a wide range of experiences. The experiences of the students were able to influence their own identities as well as their broader perspectives on race. The collection of narratives from minority and majority perspectives has assisted in comparing the experiences of white students to the experiences of students of color, and serves to influence perspectives on the importance of diversity as well as reveal avenues for developing anti-racist behaviors. Further, this collection of different perspectives assists in challenging existing norms through helping students become better allies to racial minorities at Butler University, overall creating a more inclusive, welcoming environment.

The conversations that we had with the students were recorded for textual analysis. After each of the interviews, Martarano and I transcribed the conversations, identified the stories told, and classified them as either a generalized experience narrative or a personal experience narrative. We used open coding in order to further analyze the transcriptions of the interviews in order to identify patterns and themes amongst numerous stories and develop claims. From our analysis, we were able to start thinking about which claims and themes were the most prominent and which stories would be the most impactful to others based on the literature of effective storytelling.

3. EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS OF COLOR

Interviews with students of color who currently attend Butler University revealed that students of color assume that their white peers do not have to endure the same struggles as them. White students do not have the same experiences of discrimination and racism as students of color thus their experiences are vastly different. “For [students of color], racism materializes at every juncture of society, surfacing in the most well-intentioned interactions, looming as a question mark above every unpleasant encounter, shaping every decision, and guiding every step.” (Morrison, 2010) White students and other “privileged members of society” do not have this same awareness of how race, power, and privilege affect the interactions that they have with people contributing to “a distinct split between the world of whites and the world of these students of color.” (Morrison, 2010)

We found that this difference in awareness influences the perspectives of students of color and how they perceive their white peers. Most of these perceptions focus on the privileges of their white peers as the students of color notice that their white peers do not have to endure the same burdens or struggles that they have to face. For instance, white students have the privilege of ignoring the discrimination or racism that occurs around them whereas the students of color have the burden of experiencing them. The micro and macro aggressions that students of color have to endure while attending a predominantly white institution may vary in scope and scale, but they are widespread and common. These behaviors arise from peers as well as some faculty and cause students of color to feel as though they have to be consciously aware of their surroundings and people with whom they interact. One story shared by Cole, a biracial student at Butler, refers to an instance where one of his friends, an African American female, went to a

party during their freshman year with other friends who were also students of color and felt very uncomfortable because of the attitudes of the other students at the party:

One of my friends was going to some party [during freshman year].

She was borrowing some dude's vape and she was just going around having a nice time, trying to enjoy herself. But our other friends were trying to get her out of the party because in the room, all these white people were staring at her and they're like, "Why are you trying?" "Why are you enjoying yourself? Why are you trying to have a good time?"

And what she didn't realize is that the person whose dorm it was, who was having the party, had a giant confederate flag just hanging on the window.

She was trying to enjoy herself, but as a minority on campus, not only do you have to be able to watch out for yourself, but you have to be there for your friends. And so, even though, she was just literally trying to enjoy herself, our friends had to be consciously vigilant to make sure that she doesn't do something to hurt herself, or doesn't do something to provoke these other people who clearly have questionable morals, that they wouldn't do something or do something destructive to their friend.

The story exemplifies how some students of color can feel out of place at predominantly white institutions because of the attitudes of their white peers. The attitudes and facial expressions of the white attendees were interpreted to be negative and unwelcoming; thus the students of color felt that they needed to be "consciously vigilant" in order to protect themselves as well as each other. The confederate flag hanging in the window contributed to the interpretation that this was

not a safe space for students of color given the history and representation of the flag as a symbol of racial animus and white supremacy among its varied interpretations.

The insensitive behaviors and attitudes of white students also arise during discussions about race in classroom settings. Students of color are often marginalized from their peers as they are looked at to answer or speak on topics dealing with race. The students of color who were interviewed felt that white students are given a choice of whether or not they want to engage within these conversations whereas students of color are not given the same choice. “While Students of Color are forced to perpetually think about and speak on behalf of their race, white students often remain unconscious of their racial identity and accompanying privileges” as they do not have the same pressure applied to them to think about how their race/ethnicity affects their overall existence in society (Harris et al., 2018). Sometimes, the professors as well as their peers look to the minority students to explain their ideas or opinions about racial issues. This is problematic in that these students feel pressured by their professors and classmates to answer questions or concerns about race, making them uncomfortable during these instances. “Being the only [student of color] in a predominantly white environment may influence students' feelings of tokenization and can increase white students' expectations that students of color will act as the voice that speaks on behalf of all people of color” (Harris et al, 2018) When students of color do share their own experiences within a classroom setting, they are sometimes met with resistance from their peers, making the situation even more uncomfortable for them.

The insensitive behaviors of white students and faculty directed towards students of color at predominantly white institutions may be unintentional, deriving at least partially from lack of exposure to non-white people. The lack of racial awareness “on the part of privileged people frustrates those for whom racism is very much a part of an ever-present reality” and contributes

to the difficulty that students of color have to build interracial friendships (Morrison, 2010) . The difference in awareness between students of color and white students leads to white students not understanding how their actions and behaviors can be problematic. The lack of racial awareness contributes to them saying racist jokes, phrases, and slurs as they do not recognize the issue with their behavior.¹ And because they do not recognize how their behavior is problematic, they attempt to justify this behavior. There have been a few instances described by students of color where their white peers justify their racist behavior because they assume their friendship with a student of color allows it. A few students told stories about their white peers using the N-word while singing along to a song or in a casual setting around friends. Maddie, a Black female student, told us of the following instance with a white female friend of hers during freshman year:

She started slowly dropping her guard, and she became comfortable with us.

And there is really something to say when someone feels comfortable, or if they're in their own space, they start letting loose, and she would start calling my friend and I up on the phone and saying, "What's up my..." and say the N word.

And she would start screaming the N-word in the car with songs.

Maddie's experience showcases how the efforts of students of color to build friendships across racial lines can be difficult due to the insensitive comments and behaviors that white students can

¹ Lack of education and awareness is one explanation for this behavior. There certainly are people who are consciously racist in their beliefs and tell these jokes and make these comments intentionally.

exhibit. The singing of the N-word in songs has become a popular debate between some white people and people of color because white people often question how the word can still be offensive if it is used in a song. To justify their use of the racist language, they say something like, "It's in the song, I'm just singing the song," or think that they are able to get away with using racist language because their friend is a person of color. They assume that these circumstances allow them to use the word, and they often do not understand the weight and stigma that the word carries with it. When their problematic behavior is addressed, some white people get defensive and try to warrant their behavior through gaslighting. This is exemplified in another story told by Lauren:

Freshman year a guy was making fun of my roommate and trying to be jokey and kidding because they were all friends, and he was doing the slanty eye thing where he pulled his eyes back. And I wasn't there. My roommate, who is half Korean, she apparently confronted him once and went, "Hey don't do that. That hurts my feelings."

Then he did it again in front of all of their friends who, none of them are Asian, all of them are white. And when she said, "Hey actually, it hurts my feelings, stop it," everyone told her, "Don't be so sensitive."

Later that day she's crying, and I go, "What's wrong with you? Why are you crying?" And she goes, "You know that guy across the hall, he's been doing the slanty eye thing to me, and it's really hurting my feelings."

I got really upset. I was in the middle of brushing my teeth and I didn't have shoes on, but I walked out of the doorway and I'm like, "Where's he at?"

In front of everyone, I said “That's inappropriate and don't do that again.”

I didn't yell. I wasn't unnecessarily aggressive, but I was like, “I'm going to nip this in the bud now because someone needs to tell you that that's really not cool.”

Apparently from that point forward the way they acted around me and all those people who saw was different than the way they acted when they were around other people. Apparently they would say racially charged jokes around other people but never around me.

The actions of the male student across the hall are not only incredibly insensitive and racist but were also harmful to the emotional wellbeing of Lauren's roommate. The roommate repeatedly asked him to stop making the joke; however, he still did it anyway and even told her, “Don't be so sensitive,” which resulted in Lauren's roommate crying. By the male student saying, “Don't be so sensitive,” the male student was trying to gaslight the roommate into thinking that she was the one who was at fault instead of him taking responsibility for his own actions.

In Maddie's story of her white friend using the N-word, she addresses how some of her white peers exhibit insensitive behaviors more commonly when in informal settings. Most of the racist and aggressive behaviors that occur on campus towards students of color arise during times where white students feel comfortable in their settings. These are usually informal settings where students feel that they are unsupervised and allowed to relax. For instance, residence halls or social events such as house parties are usually where racist and discriminatory behavior occurs. These spaces are important socializing spaces for undergraduate students as it allows them to meet people and can “facilitate the formation of interracial friendships.” (Harwood et al, 2012).

Yet, these spaces allow for racial aggressions to occur contributing to a negative racial climate overall, impacting students' of color experiences at the institution.

In another story, Cole speaks to how micro and macro aggressions are able to occur in informal spaces:

People are comfortable in their homes and kind of let their guard down. I remember one big thing was my freshman year roommate who was white.

He just felt comfortable casually saying the N word just while he was gaming and playing.

And I was like sitting right there, and I remember that was a big thing of, "A, you're gonna say that? and B, you're going to say that in front of me? and C, you feel comfortable saying that when you're home alone?".

So I think there's definitely something to that kind of when people are, where they think they belong when people, they feel comfortable, they have no problem just kind of letting their inhibitions fly free.

A story told by Maddie about an experience she and her friends had while attending a house party on campus, offers another example of how comfort in informal settings allows for negative interactions to occur between students of color and white students:

I remember a friend [and I], she's also a multiracial mixed woman, we were at a party, and we were with two of our Black male friends and we were minding our business.

We really weren't dancing, we're just talking and standing kind of more in the corner. And there was a white guy.

We did not know him, we had never talked to him.

He came over and he asked us if we had drugs. He did not know us.

Nothing.

Then our friend who was with us did a really good job at not letting it bother him and just kind of being like, no, like, get out of here. I think that's something that really stood out to me.

Maddie's story draws attention to the negative stereotypes that are associated with Black people and how they are able to be reinforced through interactions such as the one described. According to Maddie's story, there was nothing that occurred beforehand to suggest that she and her friends had drugs on them. Therefore, the guy asking if the Black students had drugs suggests that he was assuming they did because of the stereotype he associates with African Americans.

It is also important to note that the interaction within the story may be able to counter the negative racial stereotype for the white peer. Maddie and her friends did not have drugs on them, helping to demonstrate that not all Black people have drugs on them at all times. It is the actions and behaviors of white students, like the ones described in these stories, that make students of color feel unwelcome at predominantly white institutions, leading them to question if they truly belong.

The doubt of belonging also results from the failure of the administration to properly handle and follow through with diversity initiatives at predominantly white institutions. This contributes to making students of color feel unsupported in that they think issues that pertain to their well being on campus aren't viewed as important by the university administration. Some "students of minoritized backgrounds often perceive predominantly white institutions to be

unsupportive” because their racial and ethnic groups are socially stigmatized and unsupported within broader society (Hussain et al, 2021). Therefore, students of color are “unsure of whether they will be fully included or supported” if they attend a predominantly white institution (Hussain et al, 2021). It is important for predominantly white institutions to be supportive of its students of color through creating policies that support racial/ethnic diversity and practicing commitment to these policies (Hussain et al, 2021). The students’ perceptions of how committed the institution is to these policies affects their sense of belonging at the campus benefiting their wellbeing, performance and health while attending the institution (Hussain et al., 2021).

At Butler, a few of the students of color we interviewed noted that they are disappointed by the administration as they perceive that the institution is not as committed as they should be to their diversity, equity, and inclusion policies. Jizleth, a Latina student expressed her frustration with the administration in how they handle diversity issues on campus and how it negatively affected students of color:

If you want to preach that you have a view and hold diversity to a high standard, of a high importance, if it's critical to your institution's values ...you have diverse communities, you front this all the time.

But at the same time, how much are you putting into the resources for your students of color? For your few students of color that you have on campus, let's be real. Because obviously, there are not a lot of people here that identify as multicultural, as people of color.

So, it's like, for those students who are here, how much are you really dedicating to the resources that these students need?

...Like I said, Butler hasn't really proven to me that they handle race well. I guess I'll go and say that, because they have proven to me otherwise, they're proving to me that they don't care, that they really don't care.

Jizleth's frustration with the Butler administration in their handling of internal affairs is something that other students that talked with us feel as well.

Somo, another student of color who identifies as an African American female, expressed her dissatisfaction with the Butler administration. After she and other members of Bust The Bubble, a student lead organization on campus, had a conversation with the administration in Spring of 2019 about improving diversity initiatives on campus, she reflected on how she felt gaslighted because none of the promises that they made to her and her organization were ever fulfilled:

They definitely gaslighted us, ... I was sitting in front of the President, Vice President and Provost telling them they need to take diversity initiatives and social justice seriously.

And they're like, "We will, we will" but they kept telling us "things take time."

Just a bunch of a whole lot of gaslighting, which really made me just put me off because I was like okay so these are your values that you promote all the time from Ovid Butler, whoever else, and he left with these statements everywhere about diversity, but we're literally giving you actionable items on a

piece of paper, and you're telling us that it's going to take time and you don't know if you can do it and it costs money?

I was like, "It doesn't feel urgent right now but I guarantee, in a year, in two years it's going to feel urgent.

Somo felt that the administration did not care enough to take what she and her peers had to say about improving diversity initiatives seriously. The administration expressed interest in talking to Bust The Bubble for this purpose; however, Somo felt that they were not willing to spend the time and money that is needed to start improving these initiatives. Because of Somo's experience with the administration, she became distrustful that the administration actually cared about diversity issues on Butler's campus thus affecting her perception of inclusivity on the campus.

The presence of the National Panhellenic Conference² and Interfraternity Council³ organizations on campus is another area where students of color do not feel welcomed. Because Greek Life at Butler is heavily populated by white students with little diversity, students of color can often feel as though they are not allowed to join. This occurred in an experience that Ericela, a Chicana student, had during her freshman year at an event hosted at Butler meant to expose new students to the various clubs and organizations on campus. Her friend was interested in learning more about one of the sororities; however, they felt that the sorority member was hesitant to even engage them:

“My friend who was also Latina, one time at Block Party—which is I guess the fair for clubs and organizations.—freshman year we pulled up and the

² The National Panhellenic Conference is the governing body composed of 26 national women's fraternities. This is different from the National Pan-Hellenic Council which is the governing body composed of the nine national historically African-American fraternities and sororities (Doyle, 2019).

³ The Interfraternity Council is the national association of collegiate men's fraternities.

sorority—I don't remember what sorority I would call it out if I remembered—but the sororities are obviously recruiting, they were looking for students.

My friend noticed that they were passing out flyers to literally everybody. But I mean, I don't know if it was just by chance that the girl got tired, the girl didn't want to, but as soon as my friend went around, she just didn't give her one.

So my friend actively went after her. She's like, “Oh, can I have one?”

And then the girl hesitated to give her one, to give her a little flier that was like what is this sorority.

So I guess in that respect, it was pretty exclusive.”

For Ericela and her friend, their experience trying to form a connection with Greek life at Butler resulted in them feeling like outsiders on their new campus. The girl handing out the fliers was hesitant to give one to Ericela's friend, making Ericela and her friend feel unwanted. The perception of the exclusivity of Greek Life at Butler being reserved for only the white majority contributes to the feeling of some students of color feeling unwelcome on the campus. However not all students of color abstain from joining Greek life. Some reflected on her decision to join one of the sororities on campus:

I didn't even really think about the impact, or the issue that would come with that, when I was going into recruitment or, and when I got into Theta and all that stuff. It didn't really cross my mind.

I realized that once I was in it, "I'm not like a lot of these people." I'm like some of them and that's why we're all in the same house. We share the same values at core, yes. But you can't deny there's differences between us.

And I always wondered to myself, "Would I've gotten the same experience but I have the same outlook on Greek Life if I had been in Black Greek Life? And one of the Black sororities?"

I think I would have honestly, my perspective on it all would have changed, but it wouldn't have been worse or anything, it would have just been more evolved, I would say I definitely would have had a different way of looking at it but I definitely think being in Theta has afforded to me, a broader experience at Butler because I still do have those really close friends that I used to have, and I just inhabit this other space really well too so I kind of get like the best of both worlds sort of thing.

Somo's reflection on her decision to join Greek life at Butler is positive in that she has formed close friendships with her sorority sisters and was able to have a "broader experience" at Butler because of her decision to join. Somo's experience exemplifies how homophily is able to help form interracial relationships. Somo says that she and the rest of the members in the sorority shared the same core values, which acted as an important factor to her joining. Even though there was a clear racial difference, she felt that she still belonged because of the other similarities that she shared with the other members. The differences in the experiences told by Jizleth and Somo reflect how students of color are able to have different experiences at predominantly white institutions. The decision of a student of color to go to a predominantly white institution does not

automatically mean that all of their experiences with becoming acclimated to the campus and forming friendships will be negative.

4. HOW DO THESE NEGATIVE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES AFFECT THE WELLBEING OF STUDENTS OF COLOR?

The social experiences at Butler can impact the wellbeing of students of color in that if they feel excluded by their peers in social interactions or unsupported by the institution, they are going to be affected emotionally and mentally. For example, Cole spoke about how he feels unaccepted by his white peers because of the way they act toward him as a Black queer male. Ultimately, their actions make him feel that he needs permission to stay on campus by his white peers and the Butler institution itself. Cole explained that because the campus is predominantly white, white people are able to feel more comfortable because they are in a familiar setting. In turn, this makes minorities feel like they are guests in someone else's home thus they need permission to enter spaces and feel comfortable. Many studies have previously used this metaphor to express the sense of exclusion that students of color feel when attending predominantly white institutions. Minorities feel like they are guests in someone else's house as they are never able to relax and "put [their] feet on the table" (Turner, 1994). Guests are not family; they must follow the family's wishes without question, keep out of certain rooms in the house, and always be on their best behavior. Further, guests have no history in the house that they occupy as there are no photographs that reflect their image or anything else that relates to their own identity. (Turner, 1994). Cole's feeling of being excluded by the Butler community made him relate to being a houseguest in someone's home. Even though he pays the tuition and fees to go to Butler, he does not feel that he is welcomed into a safe environment as his white peers and the institution do not assist in making him feel welcomed.

Similarly, other students of color with whom we talked expressed that they feel that they are entering white people's territories when coming to a predominantly white institution. Maddie expressed that she was "really afraid to come to Butler" because it is predominantly white and felt that she wouldn't find any friends of color. For students of color, it can be difficult to transition into predominantly white spaces especially when they do not feel that the space is trying to assist them with the transition. This leaves them feeling unvalued and excluded, affecting their sense of belonging at the institution. Most predominantly white institutions do not account for the additional stressors that their underrepresented students face. Students of color have to adjust socially if they are not used to being in predominantly white spaces, and, in some cases, academically.

Previous "research has shown that social adjustment significantly affects students' overall college adjustment and that problems with social adjustment can be detrimental to students of color's success at PWIs" (Woldoff et al., 2011). Recent studies indicate that it is critical for institutions to emphasize their commitment to diversity in order to increase the sense of belonging for students of color (Hussain et al., 2021). "Discrimination and bias serves to undermine the positive psychological connection that students of color can have to their campus, and positive support from the institution at large, even perceived support, can serve to disrupt the negativity and enhance positive experiences for students of color." (Hussain et al, 2021) Social support networks, feelings of exclusion or alienation, faculty-student relations, and the college environment are all factors that contribute to the success rate of underrepresented students (Woldoff et al., 2011). It is important that students of color feel supported by their institution as it leads them to perform better academically and encourages them to engage socially (Hussain et al., 2021).

In another narrative told by Cole, he elaborates on feeling unvalued by the institution when he reflects on his experience with the process of medical withdrawal after his first semester freshman year. The feeling was so overwhelming that he was not “able to deal with kind of the isolation [and] the objectification that [some] feel as a person of color or as a queer person or as a minority on this campus.” He further adds that the process to return to Butler after withdrawing was even more difficult for him:

I remember just even the process of trying to come back, trying to re-enroll after my medical withdrawal, and just people did not care, people did not want to help, people did not care.

You have to consciously fight for just a spot. And I think that's very telling and I think that's kind of a universal experience for anybody, any minority on campus is that if you want to feel like you belong, if you want to have a space you're going to have to fight for it.

Cole's experience of being a minority at Butler and his situation of going through the process of medical withdrawal had a great negative impact on his mental health. His experiences further impacted his feelings of being “unwanted” by the university. His claim that minorities have to fight for a spot to stay on campus exemplifies how experiences affect not only student's comfort but their well-being overall. Cole's experiences when he first arrived at Butler were so taxing for him that he decided to take a semester off for the sake of his mental health. Cole states that the raw reality of feeling unvalued as a student of color by the institution and his peers contributed to his mental health decline in his first semester at Butler. As a queer student of color, he felt

objectified and there were no faculty members that, he felt, cared enough to help him through that tough part of his life. Because Cole is a minority, he already felt unaccepted at Butler and the situation of going through medical withdrawal did not help alleviate this feeling. It only added to it. Students of color are more likely to feel unaccepted at predominantly white institutions and feeling that no one cares to help you through this tough transition from high school to college contributes even more to this feeling, thus causing students to want to drop out or transfer schools.

5. VARIED EXPERIENCES

It is important to highlight that not all students of color have the same experiences when it comes to experiencing micro and macro aggressions in their lifetimes. Because students of color come from different backgrounds, some arrive having more positive experiences in predominantly white spaces and are not aware of how these spaces can be difficult for their peers of color. Lauren, a Filipina student, stated that she “never really noticed skin colors before Butler” and never understood what microaggressions were until learning about it in a class at Butler. It was then that she realized that she experiences them a lot as a student of color who went to predominantly white schools for her entire life. After learning about microaggressions, she was able to reflect on the actions of her peers during her childhood and recalls experiencing microaggressions as a child; however, at the time she was not offended because she did not see their actions as being racist and just ignored it. Because Lauren did not recognize these actions as racism, she did not have difficulty in predominantly white spaces. This cannot be said for all students of color.

Another student of color named Orly who is half Mexican had very different experiences as a person of color before arriving at Butler. Orly shared a story with us about when her family attended her brother's baseball game. The game was during the pandemic and a woman at the game got upset that Orly's family was a large number of people. The woman then confronts Orly and her family saying "There aren't supposed to be this many of you, you can only bring two." Orly says:

She was really, really mad. My mom was like, "Oh, I'm so sorry. We didn't know. We could send people home."

She was like, "It's fine."

I turned to my grandpa to explain to him in Spanish what the woman was saying. Then the woman turns to us as she's walking away and mumbles under her breath, "Go back to your fucking country."

And I said, "What?" Because I just thought she was saying something to us. I didn't really register what she had said.

Then she turns to us and goes, "Go back to your fucking country!"

Orly's experience at her brother's game exemplifies how extreme the experiences of students of color can be before arriving at Butler. The interaction between the woman and Orly's family was based on very racist and xenophobic ideals that the woman possessed about Hispanic people. Orly had this experience before coming to Butler and it is very different from Lauren's experiences. Lauren did not have any vicious racist comments made to her in her experiences whereas Orly did. The dichotomy of these two stories showcases that students of color do not have the same experiences in their lives therefore they should not be treated like they do.

At Butler, this is often not recognized and students of color are often pressured to align their identities and values with other students of color simply because they are minorities at a predominately white institution. The expectation and pressure for students of color to all be in sync is frustrating for them, especially if they do not have the same ideologies when it comes to racial discussions. Lauren gives an example of this frustration as she talks about the even more common frustration of feeling pressure to speak about racial topics in the classroom:

Sometimes it feels like an opportunity and I'm like, I want to talk about this. But other times when I'm not in that mood, it does feel kind of like, I always talk about this and people need to be tired of hearing my voice on this.

I'm not always the only person of color in the room. Maybe there will be like two of us. But then it's you and the other guy are looking at each other, the other dude definitely isn't into it, you're like, "damn it, it has to be me now".

And maybe the other person is not on the same page as you which is even worse sometimes.

When I was learning about microaggressions in class, we were talking about microaggressions and I went, "Oh this is an example of a microaggression that happened to me." And then another person of color in the room went, "I strongly disagree," not *strongly* but I was just a little embarrassed, so I was like, "Am I crazy? Is putting someone's arm and testing their skin color not a microaggression?"

According to the person, it wasn't. According to the professor, the professor was like, "I don't know how I should get involved in this."

But I don't know, that's the thing that happens; not everyone assumes all POC are on the same page, and that's just not true of any community.

Yeah, so that's probably the thing that gets annoying in classes, is the burden does fall on you mostly, but then you're not portraying everybody.

Lauren's Story showcases not only her annoyance with feeling the need to always speak on topics about race as a student of color but also the fact that students of color are not always in agreement about certain aspects within these discussions. For instance, Lauren talks about how she second guesses herself on what qualifies as a microaggression because the other student of color in the class disagreed with her. This provides support to suggest that students of color are not always in sync about racial issues and should not be expected to be. Students of color come from various backgrounds with different experiences before arriving at Butler. Thus, individual students of color should not be pressured to be representatives for all racial minority groups or constantly speak on topics about race.

SECTION 6: WHITE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Most of the students of color we interviewed indicated that they think that white students do not have the same experiences as they do simply because white students are a part of the majority at Butler, and therefore, they do not have to face the same struggles to try to fit in at Butler. The white students we interviewed did not mention any experiences or struggles similar to the students of color in regards to facing discrimination based on their race; however, some white students did discuss struggling to feel included. Normally, white students do not have to

consider other factors as to why they are being excluded like students of color do. Yet, this is not to say that white students don't ever feel excluded in social situations.

People can feel excluded for many reasons. When social situations arise, people are constantly re-negotiating their identities in order to fit in with the group that they are around. Sociologist Erving Goffman's work on self presentation and his theory of impression management suggests that how one presents themselves within social situations guides others' behaviors (Nickerson, 2022). White students typically do not have to account for how their skin tone or racial/ethnic background will influence how they are received when they enter a room, unlike students of color. None of the white students who we interviewed spoke to how their racial/ethnic backgrounds influenced them when walking into new spaces. However, one white student spoke about how he is marginalized in another way.

A student named Rob, who identifies as a white male, said that sometimes he feels excluded because of his hearing disability. He says that even though his disability is not apparent as a racial difference, he struggles sometimes socially. Rob says that he does not feel included and faces microaggressions from people because of his disability. Rob has to consider the actions of people in regards to his disability as students of color have to do the same in regards to their race or ethnicity. The way that people perceive you affects their behavior towards you.

Because Rob is hearing impaired, some of his peers change their behavior and tone of voice as if he is "stupid." Rob's circumstance allows him to better understand how it is difficult for students of color to adjust at a predominantly white institution because he has also had to learn to adjust. While Rob's experiences are different in type, scale, and scope than those faced by students of color, he is able to empathize with students of color in how difficult it is to feel comfortable in social settings. This active perspective taking makes it easier for Rob to place

himself in the shoes of a student of color as he can relate to being excluded at times. Perspective taking has been shown to decrease stereotyping and prejudice as it allows for people to empathize with people belonging to different groups (Galinsky et al., 2004).

Some white students do not concern themselves with thinking about the problems with the diversity initiatives at Butler. A white female student named Marcy stated that she wasn't concerned about diversity initiatives when coming to campus as it was something she "never really thought about". She also told us that she did not notice the lack of diversity at Butler until one of her professors said it. Most students of color who choose to attend a predominantly white institution are concerned about the diversity initiatives of the campus they will be attending as it will be mainly affecting them if they choose to go to the school.

It is a privilege for white students to not have to be concerned with diversity rates and initiatives at predominantly white institutions whereas students of color don't have this same privilege. Some white students are able to understand their privilege in comparison to their peers who are students of color. The realization of their privilege further allows them to understand how students of color are impacted from their lack of privilege. Ned, a white student that we talked to stated:

I will never understand what it is like to not be the majority of the population. To not have the President be a white man, both for the country and for our university,... to not have a lot of professors that are white men, to not have all these things.

Despite the historical inaccuracies of some of these points—the U.S. had a Black president for 8 years between 2008-2016 for example—Ned's statement indicates that he recognizes his own

privilege in society as a white male and the privilege that this status is able to afford him. He does not have to worry about being an underrepresented minority in society. Ned then tells a narrative that further showcases his recognition of his own privilege:

So, [I was] speaking to this person, it's my first semester here, very wide eyed like "Oh, this place is great, I love it here." You can't really see the flaws.

And this person's like, "They're just, they're not making any room for people of color, they're not actually trying."

And I remember, initially wanting to argue, and then going, "No, this isn't my place." Not that I'm not, per se, allowed to speak on this, but especially with the situation I was in, and this person was a senior here, and a person of color, and I was a fairly innocent white freshman.

So I was like, "I should sit here and learn, and listen to this person, and take that into consideration as I go along and not try to argue something back [that I probably] know nothing about.

Ned's decision to sit and listen allowed him to be able to see how students of color are impacted by the diversity initiatives and how his whiteness gives him the benefit of being blind to the flaws of the diversity initiatives.

7. COMPARING THEMES IN STORIES TOLD BY STUDENTS OF COLOR AND WHITE STUDENTS

Even though it seems that white students and students of color have very different experiences while attending predominantly white institutions, our research revealed that there is

some overlap in their experiences. For instance, both students of color and white students code-switch in intercultural conversations. Intercultural conversations are conversations which involve people from more than one race or ethnicities. These conversations can be uncomfortable for some because race is a sensitive and politicized topic in the U.S. and there can be a variety of opinions that can arise and the situations can become very tense based on what is said. The “politeness protocol, a ground rule stating that potentially offensive or uncomfortable topics should be (a) avoided, ignored, and silenced or (b) spoken about in a very light, casual, and superficial manner.” often discourages discussions about race (Sue, 2013). Society teaches us to avoid conversations that are controversial if in mixed settings as it works against creating social harmony. Our research revealed that both students of color and white students prefer to avoid getting into arguments and disputes over their thoughts and beliefs about race and racism. The social pressure to avoid these types of conversations contribute to the difficulty that students have to have an open discussion about race.

The discomfort that is felt can lead people to alter their behavior because they are worried that they might offend the other people who are also a part of the conversation. Previous research has shown that students of color feel the need to conform to the environment that they are in via code-switching in order to be palatable to their white peers. Students of color feel like they need to not be their genuine selves in order to be accepted with predominantly white spaces (Wright, 2016). They feel if they do not code-switch, their white peers will be less likely to include them within these spaces. Code-switching allows for students of color to be able to participate within intercultural conversations without being marginalized or discriminated against (Wright, 2016).

The backgrounds of students and their cultural identities have the ability to influence their perceptions on certain issues when it comes to race. Because some of the white students

come from areas that are less diverse, they tend to have little opportunity to actually interact and engage in conversations with people of color. The lack of interaction across cultures leads to implicit biases. White students' unawareness of their own biases and attitudes "influence responses that are more difficult to monitor and control." (Dovidio et al., 2002) Because white students are unaware of their own implicit biases, this contributes to the insensitive comments and jokes that they may make when interacting with students of color. Conversations about race tend to be a time where students of color and white students code-switch in order to adapt to the discomfort felt in the room.

In class discussions where they're having discussions about race or ethnicity, or that type of identity, I always feel like I have to be the one to talk and everyone I feel like is looking at me," said Lauren.

Because sometimes I might be the only person of color in the room, and they're just, they don't want to step over what you're going to say but they just need you to say something. Sometimes you don't want to be talking about it.

You're like, "Can I just take a break today? I don't want to be the representative for all the brown people, like, it's really boring, and I'm not an accurate portrayal for everybody.

As the only student of color in the room in some cases, Lauren feels she has to be the one to speak up because everyone else in the room looks for her to explain first before they comment on anything. We are able to see the discomfort that white students feel due to their reaction when a question is asked during these discussions about race or ethnicity. They tend to be more quiet

and wait for the student of color to speak first before they react. This is connected to the feeling of not wanting to offend people in the room by saying anything that would be insensitive towards people of color or because they are trying to make sure that more diverse voices are heard. Thus white students often do not want to provide their opinions during these conversations.

Students of color and white students also share some similarities in that they feel more comfortable in spaces where they are surrounded by people who share the same racial and behavioral characteristics as they do. This notion of homophily, the tendency for people to seek out people or be attracted to those who share similarities to themselves, allows for people to feel comfortable within their settings. By attending a predominantly white institution, students of color are more likely to spend time with other students of color as this is where they feel most comfortable. Research has shown that cross cultural mixing is not always common even if there are many opportunities for it (Al Ramiah et al. 2014). The differences in cultures, norms, values, and behaviors are contributing factors to how often cross cultural mixing occurs. Belonging to a group that shares common ideals and values is less anxiety producing than attempting to make connections outside of this group. This anxiety “has been shown to be a vital factor in groups' maintaining their distance from one another” (Al Ramiah et al., 2014). The perception of the outgroup's norms and attitudes from the ingroup determines how much contact is made between the groups (Al Ramiah et al., 2014).

8. SUCCESS STORIES

While at Butler, some of the students of color who talked with us noted that they have found some spaces where they feel safe and feel like they belong. They utilize these spaces in their spare time to hangout, eat lunch, and connect with other students of color on campus. A

student named Manuel commented that the Diversity Center on campus acts as his “safe haven” where he “can exist without being threatened.” Ericela credited the Diversity Center as being responsible for her feeling included at Butler. She states that:

Within that realm [of the Diversity Center], I would say that I definitely feel included in many different aspects. And I think that probably started, definitely when I was a freshman.

I feel a lot of gratitude for it just because I think that if the Diversity Center wasn't there, I don't know if I would have similar sentiments of inclusion [at Butler].

Maddie also credited the Diversity Center as being a mechanism for helping her find a group of friends and being like a “home” to her during her time at Butler. Maddie stated in her interview that she was able to make a family through the Diversity Center, describing that “family” as “Just anyone who walks into the Diversity Center, mostly minorities, [but] if they weren't minorities, if they were white... they were diversity minded or activists or good allies.” Maddie also talked about how the community within the Diversity Center kept her from transferring out of Butler. She reflected on how the community within the Diversity Center felt like a family who takes care of one another, and she decided to stay at Butler to assist the incoming minority freshman who would also probably have a hard time adjusting to life at Butler. “[I stayed] because I had a duty, I had obligations, I had a responsibility to our people and our family to stay here.”

The Diversity Center wasn't the only space that students of color felt that they belonged. In a story that was shared earlier, Somo explained that she found friendships in white spaces

after joining Greek life at Butler. She was able to find people who have the same core values as her despite their racial differences and is grateful for the friendships and experiences that this predominantly white space was able to provide for her. Spaces such as these are vital for students of color to be successful while attending a predominantly white institution as they provide a sanctuary for the student as well as a sense of community.

CONCLUSION

This research that has been discussed throughout this paper has been able to provide an insight into the lives of both students of color and white students at Butler University. Our research has been able to reveal the divergences and overlaps between experiences of students of color and white students that has not really been addressed in previous research. Our research has shown that students belonging to minority and majority groups are uncomfortable with intercultural conversations, specifically those that occur within classroom settings. As a result, students tend to avoid these conversations as they can be uncomfortable for all parties involved. This also contributes to a lack of formation of interracial relationships as students often feel more comfortable around people who share the same characteristics and values as they do.

Our research has also revealed a paradox that occurs when racial discussions arise within classrooms. On the one hand, white people often hear the message that they should talk less and instead sit back and listen to people of color's perspective; on the other, they recognize that they should not constantly place the burden of talking about race on people of color. The students of color who were interviewed noted that they often feel uncomfortable when their white professors

and white peers look to them to speak during conversations about race. Teachings of how to be a racial ally encourages listening when in conversations about race as it helps to build trust yet people of color don't want to have to teach white people about things having to do with race. Future work is required to identify practical strategies for how to properly tackle these tensions and how to facilitate conversations about race when in a mixed setting. Although this research has illuminated vital stories, shared patterns of experience, and diverse views, it is qualitative rather than quantitative, and is therefore not easily generalizable. Further, because the topic of race is sensitive and because recounting past experiences of racial trauma is difficult emotionally and psychologically, some of the stories omit material that would assist in identifying the problems and solutions. It is common for stories of trauma to be fractured or incomplete as it can be difficult for people to recall such emotionally difficult events.

However, our research has revealed important themes and areas where additional work is needed to build stronger racial allyship, as well as reaffirming the need and value of safe spaces and systems of support for students of color who attend predominantly white institutions. Providing these students with a myriad of resources and areas of support will help increase the success rate of students of color who attend predominantly white institutions. Providing workshops, training, and opportunities for learning about race, racism, and DEI efforts, can help create a more inclusive student community, founded on greater racial allyship. The workshop developed from this work, where stories are placed at the center of the discussion, has the potential to be an effective strategy in these efforts.

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