Ebony in the Ivory Tower: Social Narratives of Faculty and Staff of Color at a Predominantly White Institution

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Abstract

The realm of academia has long been a restricted domain, occupied at all levels by members of the racial and gender majority. In recent years, these demographics have shifted allowing for the presence of a broader range of individuals and experiences in universities across the nation. However, despite the increasing presence and success of people of color in higher education, a disparity remains, greater on some campuses than others. Universities in which the gap of representation remains wide and disproportionate in relation to population demographics are termed predominantly White institutions (PWIs). This paper will examine the experiences of faculty and staff of color at the University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA), a public liberal arts university and PWI in Western North Carolina. Using grounded theory and inductive research methods, this case study analyzes data from individual interviews along with existing research to uncover themes around the experiences of these faculty and staff members, and to locate these motifs within the trends presented by extant literature on people of color in higher education. A critical race theory analysis is employed, and implications for campus climate, university policy, and community-level organizing are discussed.

1. Introduction

In recent years, institutions of higher education have experienced a marked increase in the numbers of underrepresented individuals in colleges and universities nationwide, both in student bodies and in faculty and staff profiles. Diversity in the representation of gender, racial-ethnic groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and sexual identities have become commonplace, and many universities have deemed fostering diversity an institutional imperative. Likewise, research has consistently shown diversity initiatives and a varied campus population to be associated with gains in student outcomes at the undergraduate level.[1][2] However, despite this evidence, institutions have stagnated in recruitment of people of color across the board.[3] This trend is highlighted in what have become known as predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Predominantly White institutions are those in which the majority of students and faculty, or more than fifty percent, are White and signify one end of the racial divide in higher education.[4] At the other end are predominantly Black institutions, as well as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), which were historically created with the express purpose of serving Black students. Although these terms represent a binary view of racial-ethnic classification, they illustrate the persisting racial divides in academia.

As these demographics have begun to shift, researchers have turned to the experiences of students of various racial-ethnic backgrounds in institutions of higher education from HBCUs to PWIs, though relatively less focus has been aimed toward faculty and staff at these institutions. This research presents a look at the experiences of faculty and staff members of color at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, a public liberal arts university and predominantly White institution in Western North Carolina. Making visible the experiences of members of

underrepresented groups allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face, and may assist in developing institutional strategies for creating a welcoming environment and more holistically positive campus climate.

2. Background

2.1. University of North Carolina at Asheville

UNC Asheville is a public liberal arts university in the city of Asheville in the mountains of Western North Carolina. It is one of seventeen schools in the long-standing University of North Carolina system, and its only designated liberal arts institution. With about 3,600 students pursuing undergraduate degrees, is the second smallest four-year institution in the UNC system.[10] The University employs 760 full- and part-time faculty and staff as of the 2013-2014 school year. Of those 760, 663 individuals (87.2%) identify as White, and of the 3,628 students for the 2013-2014 year, 88.2% identify as White.[11] [12] As the student body has increased over the last two decades by 42%, minority presence has increased by just less than seven.[13]

This disparity is not new to the campus and is the subject of ongoing discussion from the classroom, to the student newspaper [14], and beyond.[15] Grassroots efforts have come about, largely by student organizations and, as of 2008, the university has implemented what it calls a Diversity Action Council (DAC) – a group of faculty, staff, and student representatives – the goal of which is to "create a holistic and specific definition of diversity that targets our responsibility in relation to underrepresented groups [and to] develop specific student, faculty, and staff recruitment plans to meet those responsibilities". The DAC's definition, which is specific to UNC Asheville, is "creating and supporting an inclusive and sustainable community, one in which people of all backgrounds interact respectfully and in which each member is valued". This goal is to be attained by increasing the population diversity not only with regards to race and ethnicity, but also socioeconomic background, religion, age, sexual identity, gender identity and expression, ability status, and more.[16] The definition casts a wide net and simultaneously allows for a highly inclusive interpretation of the word, as well as a sense of vagueness around how each dimension might be addressed, a criticism often leveled at such initiatives.

The Diversity Action Council has provided a starting point for the university to begin to progress in diversifying the campus profile. It has set targets in several areas of diversity and inclusion, which have been incorporated into the university's strategic plan as a matter of "public responsibility". The goals being monitored under this plan include graduation rate of students from underrepresented races & ethnicities; percentage of underrepresented students, faculty and staff describing UNC Asheville as a "welcoming place" to learn/teach/work; retention among employees from underrepresented races & ethnicities; and campus community from underrepresented races & ethnicities. [17] For each of these goals, the outcomes were below target at the time of the most recent update – most significantly that of underrepresented members of the campus community regarding UNC Asheville as a "welcoming place" to be (Fig.1).

Percentage of students who self-report as underrepresented and/or marginalized and describe the University as "a welcoming place to learn/teach/work"			
	2010	2012	2014
Actual [self-reporting as underrepresented or marginalized]	85.0	81.0	
Target	80.0	90.0	90.0
Reference [not reporting as underrepresented or marginalized]		97.8	
Diff	5.0	-9.0	

Percentage of faculty who self-report as underrepresented and/or marginalized and describe the University as "a welcoming place to learn/teach/work"			
	2010	2012	2014
Actual [self-reporting as underrepresented or marginalized]	80.0	83.7	
Target	90.0	90.0	90.0
Reference [not reporting as underrepresented or marginalized]		91.0	
Diff	-10.0	-6.3	

Percentage of Staff who self-report as underrepresented and/or marginalized and describe the University as "a welcoming place to learn/teach/work"			
	2010	2012	2014
Actual [self-reporting as underrepresented or marginalized]	83.6	71.9	
Target	90.0	90.0	90.0
Reference [not reporting as underrepresented or marginalized]		94.8	
Diff	-6.4	-18.1	

Figure 1[18]: Official data analysis on underrepresented groups' feelings of welcoming.

Additionally, and perhaps most pertinent to this research, is the data on retention of faculty and staff of underrepresented groups (Fig. 2). Though not particularly significantly below target – less than five percent – the numbers have been variable in the seven years that this goal has been measured.

Retention of full-time tenure-track faculty from underrepresented races & ethnicities								
Fall Semester	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Actual	94.7	100.0	95.5	96.2	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Target						96.0	97.0	98.0
Reference [all Faculty]	97.5	96.9	99.4	97.0	98.2	98.2	95.7	
Diff	-2.8	3.1	-3.9	-0.8	1.8	4.0	3.0	

Numerical Target set by Diversity Action Council starting in 2012

Retention of full-time staff from underrepresented races & ethnicities								
Fall Semester	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Actual	91.4	92.3	90.2	89.1	87.0	84.8	87.8	
Target						90.0	90.0	90.0
Reference [all Staff]	92.1	91.6	93.5	92.2	91.4	90.5	91.4	
Diff	-0.7	0.7	-3.3	-3.1	-4.4	-5.2	-2.2	

Numerical Target set by Diversity Action Council starting in 2012
*Note: Retirements/deaths are excluded from calculation of retention rate starting in 2012

Figure 2[19]: Official data analysis on retention of full-time faculty and staff from underrepresented groups.

34

The publicly available meeting minutes of the Diversity Action Council note that a topic of discussion at a September 2013 meeting included faculty experiences in the classroom, noting that some underrepresented instructors – and students – find the classroom to be "an intimidating place". [20] Further, some instructors have expressed concerns that students believe faculty of color to be unqualified to teach, a sentiment echoed across existing research in the area and in the narratives of participants in this study. An ongoing initiative of the DAC is to diversify faculty and staff and, in collaboration with North Carolina State University, the council has implemented a set of extensive guidelines to recruit staff and have increased diverse faculty hires.[21]

Situating UNC Asheville within the context of the greater community of the city of Asheville illustrates how the demographics and climate of the campus are both reflected by those of the city, and indicative of a lack of representation of the greater population. The city of Asheville, located within the region of Western North Carolina (WNC), differs in some ways from the surrounding areas and the state at large. The city is very politically liberal and has an artistic cultural atmosphere rather than a business-oriented one. Some of this is reflected in the liberal arts focus of the university, and it would be difficult to decipher which was the precedent. In contrast, the state has recently been more right leaning, and business centers like the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill triangle and the city of Charlotte have shaped the state culture. The city also has disproportionately low representation of people of color, as compared to the state of North Carolina on the whole. At the 2010 census, Asheville was reported as having a population of 76.2% White residents, compared to the state average of 65.3%. All populations of non-White residents were recorded at lower rates of representation than the state average, with the exception of those reporting two or more races.[22] Only 2.8% of businesses are owned by African-Americans, compared to the state's 10.5%. [23]

2.2. Existing Research

As noted, much of the research surrounding the experiences of people of color in the university setting focuses on students, as they are more numerous and more accessible than members of staff, faculty, and administration. However, a sizeable amount of research has emerged with a focus on instructional faculty and their experiences with interpersonal interactions in the classroom and with colleagues, navigating bureaucratic processes, and constructing identities in the context of academe and as a numerical minority. A vast majority of these studies reveal negative outcomes revolving around experiences of alienation, isolation and discrimination, but many also offer strategies for thriving in such an environment. Individual coping mechanisms as well as institutional initiatives are important to creating and maintaining an atmosphere in which people of color can work and thrive. Limitations of the existing research include a focus on the experiences of African-Americans over other racial-ethnic groups, and on instructional faculty over university staff members. There is a relative dearth of research information around professional staff (and non-instructional faculty in general) at the level of post-secondary education. It may not be assumed that the experiences of collegiate professors are generalizable to other positions given differences in the types of work and levels of interaction with students and colleagues; nonetheless, this research has uncovered a number of trends, which have been used to inform the current study.

2.2.1. challenges

Faculty of color face a significant number of challenges when working in higher education and at predominantly White institutions. These occur on several dimensions including interpersonal relationships, professional success, and identity development. These faculty members are confronted with obstacles not presented to their White counterparts due to pervasive and unchecked racial stereotypes, as well as being a numerical minority on campuses.

In terms of interpersonal relationships, faculty and staff of color experience strains on relationships with students, colleagues, and administration. In the classroom setting, faculty members' roles as an instructor and figure of authority are confronted with their status as a member of a marginalized racial group, and for women faculty of color this effect is compounded. [24][25] Teaching courses to a classroom of mostly or entirely White students presents issues for instructors, particularly when the topic of import necessitates racial dialogues, at which point professors must protect the feelings of students of color, challenge dominant notions held by White students, and take special care to present information in a manner that will not be interpreted as subjective or as part of an agenda.[26] Faculty of color have their knowledge and ability challenged by students more often, either directly or indirectly, and are often not regarded with the same level of respect shown to colleagues of the majority.[27][28] In a study of women faculty of color, participants reported experiences of gendered racism from White male students who challenged their authority, teaching competency, and scholarly expertise. White male students typically were not as respectful to women faculty of color, using passive-aggressive and informal communication methods, such as using professors' first

names rather than the title of Doctor, and using their social privilege to attempt to discredit the knowledge and expertise of instructors.[29]

Faculty of color also receive less favorable reviews from students than their White counterparts on teaching ability and intellect, a pattern that is also observed at the level of professional colleagues and administrative members.[30] Not only are faculty of color prone to doubts and challenges regarding their qualifications and ability, they are also subject to higher expectations in order to combat these doubts. Numerous studies have shown that faculty of color are often expected to take on heavier workloads – including teaching more courses and taking on more committee and service-oriented work – and more advisees, leading to higher levels of occupational stress.[31][32][33] This detracts from academic and research work, and, in spite of this, they are often evaluated by the same criteria as their White counterparts who are able to focus on publication and other academic pursuits. In a comprehensive review of literature concerning difficulties faced by faculty of color, Caroline Turner notes that they are expected to conduct research and publish in the same prestigious journals that White faculty do, however several barriers prevent achievement of this goal. Some studies suggest that faculty of color more often conduct qualitative research, whereas the expected journals focus on quantitative research, and topics addressing issues of people of color are often rejected. This scholarship may be seen as involving too much emotion or personal voice, and discredited as not academic enough.[34][35] Quoting Reyes & Halcon, Turner addresses the "Brown-on-Brown research taboo" by which scholarship on minority issues is "dismissed as minor or self-serving […] whereas white-on-white research is accorded legitimacy".[36] Institutional failures to take into account a plurality of research agendas contributes in part to low rates of retention and representation among faculty of color, maintaining their status as a numerical minority and the effects of this social isolation.

Recent research estimates that people of color make up around twelve to thirteen percent of full-time instructional faculty at the university level across the United States, including Asian-American, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American individuals.[37] Recruitment and retention act in tandem, and where recruitment efforts may make some level of progress, they are often undermined by lackluster rates of retention. Retention is thwarted both by faculty and staff decisions to leave a college or university due to unsatisfactory working environments and by the disproportionately low numbers of tenured and tenure-track faculty of color. They may simply not be offered tenure-track positions, denied tenure due to the aforementioned failure to meet the same standards as White colleagues [38], or find the tenure process marginalizing or alienating.[39] Because many institutions place heavy weight on research achievements as a criterion for promotion, the efforts and accomplishments of faculty of color go unrecognized, due to devaluation of race-related research topics and non-scholarly components of work, such as committee and student mentoring responsibilities. Additionally, full-time faculty members of color disproportionately occupy lower-ranked faculty positions, such as assistant or associate professor and lecturer, despite comparable academic achievement to White colleagues.

Campus racial climate plays a large role in retention difficulties, though it can be troublesome to define or measure. Sylvia Hurtado offers the definition of "a part of the institutional context that includes community members' attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity".[40] Campus climate can be influenced by institutional policies and practices, as well as the behaviors of those within, and sometimes external to, the campus community. Climate can be measured across variables of institutions' historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion, structural diversity and numeric representation of people of color, psychological climate and perceptions of attitudes and values, and behavioral climate.[41] For many faculty of color, the racial climate of a PWI can be isolating and othering.[42] Coping with or combating this othering process takes a toll professionally and personally and, for some, can lead to a process of identity negotiation, whereby individuals must construct, cover, and assess their racial-ethnic identity within the context of an oppressive and marginalizing atmosphere.

Negative perception of campus racial climate for people of color in higher education can be attributed to what Diane Lynn Gusa terms "White institutional presence".[43] Pervasive and persistent notions of whiteness as normative and neutral allow for continued exclusion of those who do not subscribe to norms of White culture, leading to negative professional and personal outcomes. This communicates to faculty and staff of color that assimilation is a requirement for success in the context of a predominantly White institution. As such, these faculty and staff members must decide between loss or suppression of culture and identity and professional achievement. As a result, many individuals report developing a sort of dual or divided identity, using code-switching (differentiated means of behavior and communication) to navigate different cultural settings.[44][45] This further illustrates the notion that to be non-White and to be academic and professional still appear to be mutually exclusive. Whether or not these values are communicated explicitly, there remain the underlying effects of White institutional presence that require covering of any racialized aspects of one's identity. Stereotype threat constitutes a real danger to one's viability. Given the existing fear of being perceived as inferior, along with the sense of hypervisibility in being perhaps the

only person of color in a given situation, feelings of being at risk of scrutiny for any and all behaviors can be stifling and increase the psychological discomfort brought on by being relegated to the role of the other.[46]

Conversely, institutions' embracement of cultural diversity often results in fulfillment of stereotyped and tokenized roles. Faculty and staff of color are often asked to sit on committees dedicated to diversity, or otherwise recruited to diversify groups and serve as the minority voice. This burden of representation has conflicting outcomes because, while it may result in tokenization and overgeneralization, it allows individuals a platform to speak on issues faced by their groups; however, they must be hyperaware and intentional in their comments, lest they be used in a negative light against other members of their groups.[47] The numerous difficulties faced by faculty and staff of color illustrate a need for education and understanding of these challenges by peers and colleagues. A number of strategies to help alleviate the stress of working on a predominantly White campus or coping with negative campus climate have emerged.

2.2.2. strategies for success

Considering the often isolating and alienating environment of the predominantly White institution for faculty of color, varied coping and success strategies are a necessity and have also been documented in research. The main interpersonal strategy for succeeding at a PWI appears to be mentorship on the part of senior colleagues, as well as on behalf of students of color.[48] Many senior faculty serve as mentors for junior faculty, teaching them how to negotiate the various challenges they will face, and faculty and staff appear to feel a responsibility to act as ambassadors for students of color.

For faculty and staff navigating the environment of the PWI, there appears to be less institutional support and less opportunity to make connections with colleagues than for White employees. In the presence of mentoring relationships, junior faculty and staff increase their network and are provided a toolbox of information for what to expect and how to cope with racist or microaggressive incidents. Lack of mentoring and the accompanying isolation has been cited as one of the most significant barriers to faculty and staff of color remaining in the academy. In contrast, faculty who persist in these environments note mentorship, collegiality among colleagues, and supportive administrative faculty as positive factors contributing to retention.[49][50]

While individual coping strategies are important, more focus may be needed on what institutional strategies can be practiced in order to create more welcoming environments for faculty of color to thrive. Dimensions on which institutional include more proactive hiring policies, better support of faculty of color through networking opportunities and workshops, support for research and publication, and recognition and reward for teaching excellence and contributions to diversity efforts.[51] These trends will be discussed further in considering strategies for change at UNCA.

3. Methods

Participants were recruited through e-mail communication to the entire faculty and staff of UNCA and snowball, or word-of-mouth, recommendations from faculty and staff members. In order to preserve an emphasis on racial-ethnic self-identification, participants were not targeted based on appearance, names, or other superficial variables, and self-described interest in participation by e-mail response was used as the initial step in identifying faculty and staff of color for the study. Following this, individual interviews were conducted by the student researcher, at which time participants' racial-ethnic identification was noted in their own terms.

The sample of participants consisted of four instructional faculty and five professional staff members, totaling nine participants. Four participants were women, and five men. All held advanced degrees in a variety of disciplines, across the university, and both junior and senior faculty and staff members were represented in the sample. Despite open recruitment methods allowing participants to define their own racial-ethnic identities and aiming for inclusion of a variety of groups, all involved participants identified as Black/African-American, or multiracial, and included both American and foreign-born individuals.

As stated, interviews were facilitated by the student researcher, an African-American woman, with each participant in a private setting. Prior research has used methods of matching the race of the interviewer and participants in order to reduce reactivity and self-censorship on sensitive, race-related issues.[5] Interviews were generally about an hour in length and were governed by a loose interview guide including open questions, such as, "How, if at all, has your racial/ethnic identity informed your experiences at UNCA?" Interviews ranged from about 45 minutes to an hour and a half, with most falling around an hour in length.

This research utilizes a grounded theory approach, a qualitative method of research focusing on the inductive analysis of data.[6] As such, the research process allowed the social narratives offered by participants to be used by the researcher to develop a set of general themes and findings, rather than to follow a deductive process of developing and testing a hypothesis. Narrative analysis (also termed narrative inquiry), as used in this study, is another method of qualitative research and has been used in many social science fields including sociology, anthropology, history, and the study of health and illness. The practice of narrative analysis emphasizes the linkage between micro and macro levels of analysis and demonstrates that individual experiences and the construction of self are understood through historical social and institutional relationships.[7]

Interviews were transcribed and coded in order to identify key themes addressed by participants. Some themes, such as the need for institutional supports for people of color were alluded to by all participants, while others that revolved around more personal experiences were identified among three to five interviewees. Some interviews presented contradictory findings, and one presented outlying information on several dimensions. While more widely identified themes are presented in the findings, implications for these outliers and potential influencing factors are considered in the discussion.

In analyzing these findings, the framework of critical race theory was employed. Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical and analytical framework, initially utilized in legal research, and eventually expanded to other fields, including that of education.[8] Some central tenets of CRT include the recognition of the permanence and pervasiveness of racism in the United States, skepticism of dominant notions of colorblindness and meritocracy, an interdisciplinary focus, and a belief in the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing society.[9] As such, this theorizing often incorporates storytelling to present counter-narratives to those of the dominant White culture. Critical race theory will be used to analyze facets of interviewees' personal narratives, as well as some implications for institutional change. Interview Questions see below.

3.1. Interview Questions

Faculty of Color Social Narratives Interview Guide
Fall 2014

Demographic Information:
1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Role/Position (Faculty, Staff):
4. Major/Department:
5. Hometown:
6. How long at UNCA?:
7. Racial/Ethnic Identity:

I. **Background Information**
   A. Tell me about your life experiences before coming to UNCA. Where did you grow up? What was the town/city like (demographically, climate)? What was your family life like? Was education emphasized? Was racial/ethnic identity emphasized?
   B. Were you a first-generation college-student? What led you to seek work at UNCA? What were your perceptions of the university prior to attending/working here? How have those perceptions changed?

II. **Racial Identity and Campus/Community Climate**
   A. How, if at all, has your racial/ethnic identity informed your experiences at UNCA? In what ways has it facilitated or inhibited your learning/teaching? Do you often feel hyperaware of your racial/ethnic identity, and if so, what causes you to feel this way? Do you feel any obligations to embrace or erase your racial/ethnic identity?
   B. Have you found UNCA to be welcoming or alienating? Do you feel included in the campus community at large? Have you ever experienced overt discrimination or prejudice? Have you felt uncomfortable by the remarks or actions of other faculty or students? How have you found balance between an authority role and a marginalized identity in the classroom? What has been your experience navigating the academic world at the administrative level?

III. Campus Resources and Policy
    A.   Are you aware of any university efforts to improve diversity and campus climate? How effective have you felt these efforts to be?

4. Findings

The data collected for this study through personal interviews both supports and challenges previous findings. While many of the interviewees faced similar difficulties to those expressed in existing research (challenges with students, doubts about qualifications, occupation of lower-ranked positions) the theme of alienation and isolation found across prior studies did not arise. There is a possibility that this may be attributed to the differing values and ideals of the liberal arts university as well as the size of UNC Asheville, compared to the large research universities where much of the prior research has taken place.

  Participants were first asked about their backgrounds with regards to familial dynamics, life experiences, and education histories. Most participants reported experiencing a strong familial emphasis on racial identity, and being exposed to ideas concerning race in early adolescence. Despite an age range spanning forty years, each had stories of recognizing their position in the racial hierarchy, illustrating the ongoing struggles of race in the United States. Additionally, education was emphasized in their upbringing. The number of first-generation college students, and those whose parents, and even grandparents had received college degrees was split evenly, so for those who came from a more highly educated family, education was seen as the logical route based on familial tradition. For those who were first-generation students and came from lower income families, schooling was presented as a route to success. Renee [52], a faculty member said, "I always kind of heard that privilege and power and race operated in terms of, we don't really live in a place of meritocracy. The myth of meritocracy is real. And I kind of heard that message that, no matter what, you still need to use education as your vehicle, your weapon, your tool for elevation and success in society."

  In beginning the narratives of faculty and staff experiences at UNC Asheville, participants were first asked about their conceptions of the university prior to arriving on campus, and how those notions may have changed as they experienced the school firsthand. Owing to the relatively small size of the university and city, many faculty and staff did not have much, or in some cases, any prior engagement with the university. Not having known many specifics, most of these previously held beliefs revolved around the broad ideological aspects of the progressive, multicultural reputation of Asheville proper, and the liberal arts designation of the university.

  In discussing his perceptions of the city before beginning work at UNCA, Malcolm, a faculty member shared:

> One impression that I had of Asheville prior to moving here was that Asheville is this extremely politically liberal place, this extremely multicultural place, and that those two characteristics made it extremely unique among Southeastern cities. When I got here I found that that wasn't really the case. Where I found diversity here was in the area of religion. A lot of religious diversity here, a lot of different religious communities coexisting within the same social space, so that, I think, is remarkable, but the cultural diversity, or I should say this narrative of cultural diversity that I was exposed to prior to moving here, I've had a harder time finding evidence for that. […] I've had a harder time finding African-American communities or African-American neighborhoods. I know now where they are because I've done some work in the community, but when I first moved here, it was not apparent at all where the Black folk were. So I kind of had to dig and hunt and ask questions and figure out "Okay, where are Black folks in Asheville? What are they doing? Do they have any relationship at all with the university?" and I learned that many don't. Many don't have any idea where UNC Asheville is in the city, much less come here to learn more, so that was a bit disconcerting. So I'm doing some things now to try to change that, but the impression I was given beforehand was not really consistent with my experience once I got here.

Referring back to the situation of Asheville within the state of North Carolina, this notion of liberalism and diversity has been fostered by the general political leanings and artistic communities of the city; however, the city's demographic profile and distribution illustrates a disjunction between this reputation and what is readily observable. This also reflects upon UNCA as a liberal arts institution within this setting. Renee expressed her prior knowledge of the liberal arts:

I thought UNCA was going to be this enlightening experience because of it being a liberal arts institution. And I had never taught at a liberal arts institution, this was my first go at liberal arts, so I looked at the tenets and again, I thought, "This is going to be enlightening, progressive students - I didn't necessarily think of liberal in terms of political affiliation, but progressive students, they have an orientation toward civic engagement, social justice. They believe in fairness, inclusiveness, diversity, because this is all you find on the web about the liberal arts model, and traditionally people who went to liberal arts institutions, like - Coretta Scott King went to a liberal arts institution, Marion Wright Edelman [founder of the Children's Defense Fund] - so out of the '60s civil right era, a lot of people went to these small liberal arts schools and then they rocked the world, they transformed it. So I just thought I was going to meet these students that would just wow me with orientations toward social justice, diversity, progressive thinking, transformation […] and I've been disappointed.

She noted that, because her teaching experiences have largely not been interdisciplinary, they may represent an insular view of student values, however, it appeared to be a fairly common finding. Given the low numbers of African-Americans and people of color in higher education, and the scarcity of positive images of people of color in any leadership roles, many White students may have never learned under a Black instructor or considered a person of color as one capable of occupying such a role. These sentiments were largely expressed through the medium of the anonymous course evaluations collected at the end of each semester, illustrating the more covert and subtle modes through which racism operates in contemporary America.

 "I remember when I realized that I couldn't depend on my student evaluations because people saw a Black man, they did not hear a professor. It didn't matter how many doctorates I had, I was going to be challenged. Just straight academic expressions of racism, just outrageous stuff that people put on there because they're anonymous," said Darrell, a long-standing professor. Several professors were themselves accused of harboring racist sentiments through these evaluations. Malcolm shared,

> My very first semester here, at the end of the semester, there was student who, in their evaluation, accused me of being an "ardent racist", and the student claimed that I spent all of my time in class trying to convince [the students] that African ways of thinking or African ways of seeing the world were superior to Western ways of thinking and seeing the world. And I was really stymied by this evaluation, because it was so out of step with my approach to teaching this particular course. And so part of me can't help but wonder whether or not their assessment of me was racially motivated. In other words, were their comments less a reflection of what I actually said in the course and what this student got from the readings, and more of a reflection of the fact that perhaps this student had never studied under a Black professor before. Perhaps this student was only then becoming aware that there were Black people that have Ph.D.'s, who were professional scholars, who taught in universities.

This was not only present for instructional faculty, but for staff members working closely with students as well. Marissa, a staff member who supervises a crew of student employees, received similar feedback, stating "I know for a fact there are some students that respect me for just being their boss, but they have an issue with my skin color. I know it because I actually have done a survey and it was anonymous and that was in there. It was like, 'Yeah, I respect you as my boss, but I know my parents have always told me that Black people are not supposed to be in power.'"

 In addition to having personal criticisms leveled at them, their qualifications and credibility are challenged, sometimes in more explicit ways. Renee recalled an incident in which a student called upon classmates to meet outside of class to discuss their issues with her teaching style. When it was brought to her attention by another individual, it was revealed that other students were non-responsive to the suggestion, and the incident was addressed in class; however, she noted,

> When I reflected on it I said, "So would this happen to a white professor, or would they automatically give them the credence?" My friend, I didn't just fall off the turnip truck. The first day of class I talk about my experiences and I send you all my bio; not only do I have a Bachelor of Science, I have a Masters and Ph.D. I've taught […] in two universities prior to you even meeting me. That should give you enough information that I'm competent and I'm a credible, reliable, knowledgeable source. And so, the fact that you question it makes me think "Would you do that to a white professor?"

This situation elucidates the unique ways in which professors of color are expected to prove their competence and ability, as well as the gendered and racialized matrix that ensnares women faculty of color.

Considering the silencing effects of working on a predominantly White campus Marissa shared,

> One piece of why silencing happens too is that I'm already tired. I'm tired. I wake up and instantly I know that people will judge me because of my skin color, my hair. You know these things already so it becomes, "How can I get through a day and just be me? Can I be me?" – and sometimes you can't be you because you know people are watching, […] so you can't flip out when someone maybe just called you an angry Black woman or whatever. So it's tough, and sometimes picking and choosing your battle is tougher.

Denise, a faculty member, said, "Being a Black woman is problematic in a lot of places and ways. […] I really don't think Black women are respected in the way that we'd like to be respected. I think often people associate us with troublemakers, you know, loud and boisterous, so I fear that. Because when I am in meetings and often I'm the only Black person in there, I almost always have to say something about this. I'm not positive that it's appreciated since nothing's changed, even the smallest things." Gendered and racialized tropes of Black women as loud and angry may work against student and colleague perceptions of credibility and trap women of color in a perpetual cycle. Marissa continued on to note how the sense of exhaustion caused by constantly negotiating instances of racialized contact with peers and students can inhibit one's ability to have racial dialogues in a calmer manner, potentially furthering these stereotyped notions. She acknowledged, "There are some folks that you know for a fact will be elaborate when they speak or be loud, but do it in such a political manner or a graceful manner that it's not seen as "angry Black woman". They're saying the same exact thing as me, a person that speaks with my face and has lots of facial expression, but that's not well-received."

Discussing the fact that only four Black professors at UNC Asheville have successfully navigated the tenure process to become a full professor, Darrell said,

> African-American women in the academy are far more endangered than African-American men. I honestly don't know if I would have made it if I were a woman. They put up with stuff that, coupled with racism, is seemingly insurmountable. So you don't see sisters becoming full professors, you just don't see it. Something like a 70% attrition rate from the time you finish your doctorate to the time you would become a full professor? That's just insane. You go through all this stuff to get your doctorate and you get hired as a lecturer, you know? You never get placed on tenure track. Your classes are always the fullest. You're always the one that students are turning to with less than respectful kinds of acknowledgments.

And while the compounded effects of sexism and racism do pose a unique barrier to women of color, tenure for faculty of color proves elusive across the board, at UNCA and throughout academe. A key component of this seems to be the heavy workloads created by obligations outside of those already existing in the classroom or in research. Several faculty members reported having been asked to fulfill roles in diversity committees or consulted about curriculum changes, though all felt clear that it was not necessarily an unwelcome pressure. One professor clarified, "there is a tokenistic element involved there, but I don't think that's a reason to not be involved."

In fact, many faculty and staff members expressed a sense of responsibility to fellow colleagues and students of color to be involved in these dialogues whenever possible, either in order to give platforms to issues faced by their communities, or to provide a positive image to combat stereotypes and preconceived notions. Derek, a staff member of student affairs said, "I don't think I would be serving my purpose of being here if I were not involved in student of colors' lives, or faculty and staff. We have an obligation as faculty and staff members to our students, just as when we were in school, and faculty and staff helped us. It's our obligation to help them in any way possible." All participants echoed this sentiment, but some held concerns that this may not be received as openly by students. Instructors reported having few to no students of color seek out their classes, even those with specified racial themes, and staff did not have much contact either. Malcolm noted,

> The one thing I've noticed here among the few Black students that I've met, is that many – not all, but many – Black students here seem to want to avoid identifying in a way that is racialized. So not wanting to identify publicly as an African-American who has a particular history in this country. I'm not sure what accounts for that. I do know that there is a culture on campus here, a sort of hyper-liberal culture that embraces, for example, notions of post-racialism, that embraces very liberal attitudes about sexual identity, which is a good thing. It's just something that, with respect to the whole racial issue, I've never encountered. I've never encountered particularly younger African-Americans who were very intentional about avoiding,

not only a racialized identity but an identity that is connected to African heritages in some way, so that's been a new experience for me to try to make sense of.

Denise looked to the effects of being a numerical minority, which harken back to Gusa's notion of White institutional presence. "As the numbers went down, the Black students who were here, I think they were trying very hard to assimilate. And so when they saw a Black professor, they would avert eye contact. If I saw somebody- often I'll see somebody and I'll go "Hey, how are you doing? I'm upstairs". That has returned, but there was a time period there where folk just looked like - no."

Fostering relationships between faculty and students, and creating community supports around racial identity has been an ongoing effort. In the past, from 1990 to 2003, UNCA had a course called the African-American colloquium, a class for entering Black students, taught by Black faculty and staff, which served to create safe space and community. Prompted by a racial incident on campus, this colloquium was born out of necessity due to negative campus climate and low academic achievement among Black students. One of the professors involved revealed,

> There had been a racial incident at one of the basketball games, and it really upset the Black students. And so there was going to be a meeting and they asked for the Black faculty and staff who could come to come. So we met and our Black students were upset, and they were crying […] and so from that group came a program called the African-American colloquium. And so the idea for us was, "Look, we have to have a community for these students" because what we were looking at at that point was the highest attrition rate and the lowest GPA. And so we thought, we'll bring folk together their very first semester here and it'll be a class they'll get credit for.

Another professor added,

> Students were failing, they were matriculating forever, going into massive student debt, they were never graduating. It was awful. There were even physical altercations in the dorms, going after each other. Brothers on the court playing basketball all day long, shooting pool all day long. Not even thinking about going to class. I mean, openly committing academic suicide. So what we did is, over the summer, Black faculty and Black staff got together – library, student affairs, academic affairs, faculty across four departments – we got together and we demanded the grades of the Black students. So we got the printouts and started going through them name by name, and the vast majority of them should not have been on academic probation. They came with the proper credentials.

This disconnect between what were clearly capable students and low rates of achievement pointed to a larger issue. Perceptions of a hostile climate on campus and in the classroom and lack of community and support systems contributed largely to the achievement gap. The African-American colloquium bridged that gap through targeted education on Black-related topics, team teaching techniques, and group trips to areas across the North and Southeast. They travelled to cities like D.C. and New Orleans and to the Sea Islands of coastal South Carolina and Georgia, learning about African-American contributions to the areas, patronizing Black-owned businesses, and visiting HBCUs. The program proved effective, and within two years, the African-American population had the highest GPA and the lowest attrition.

Soon White faculty were expressing interest and began to intern with the program, receiving symbolic kente stoles, which are still worn during the university commencement ceremonies. However, the involvement of White faculty highlighted another disparity.

> The administration didn't pay for our salaries. We added this on top of our loads. They did not pay us overload for this, but they did pay for the trips. […] This came really hard off of our backs. We had some white faculty who interned with us and when they interned with us, they got release time or reassign time, and the Black faculty didn't. And one of the White faculty brought that up in a meeting, he said, "I have my Black colleagues who are adding this on, but when I come, I get release time to do this. It's not fair and they've been doing this for a very, very long time."

One faculty member cited this as a reason for the dissolution of the program, along with declining admissions of Black students.

There are two reasons why it ended: one, the school stopped bringing in African-American students. I mean there was one class, there were actually more faculty and staff there than students. That was when it went down to one, maybe two percent of the student body being Black. So, you know, racist admissions policies, and that's what they were. The second reason was that the faculty never got paid; we just added the colloquium on top of the department requirements to teach. So you're talking about there were semesters when I was teaching five courses. How do you teach five courses at the university level? And after thirteen years, it took its physical toll. When the colloquium came up for the last time, everyone teaching it had been in the hospital, literally. And I'm not talking about, "I got a bad cold" either. I'm talking about *in the hospital*. So I went to the vice chancellor and I said, I don't care what y'all offer; you're not going to kill us teaching this. You can start paying us, and we still aren't going to do it.

The conclusion of what was clearly an effective program on campus, for both students and faculty and staff members, points to the need for sustainable diversity efforts on campus. Participants were asked to share what efforts they see being undertaken by administration or other forces on campus, and to offer input on what steps might be taken to improve the representation and experiences of people of color at UNCA. Several areas for growth emerged: administrative recruitment of students and hiring of faculty and staff of color, more engagement with the greater Asheville community, substantive changes to curricula, and the role of student organization and campus programming.

As mentioned, the Diversity Action Council has an ongoing commitment to diversifying faculty and staff through more inclusive and proactive hiring practices, and several interviewees commended this effort, noting that the challenge now is to keep that momentum going. Former Provost, Jane Fernandes, was credited in part with the significant number of faculty of color who were brought in under her tenure. With both a new Provost and Chancellor entering for the 2014-15 school year, it will be critical for these initiatives to remain in the foreground under new administration. Some faculty expressed hopefulness at the potential these changes might bring, with one individual noting, "I've heard that she is coming with a reputation for being more involved with the community and I'm hoping that she'll see these demographics and feel offended."

Student recruitment, in contrast, has not shown large gains. Many senior faculty expressed disappointment at the university's ongoing failure to increase its numbers of underrepresented students calling the trends "discouragingly stagnant." However, Rachel, a junior staff member noted,

When it comes to recruitment, it's a little more difficult because students really do have a choice of where they want to go and they're going to go where they're most comfortable, and it's really hard to change a culture. It's kind of daunting for a lot of students. They want to come to college and have fun and not have to think about that. So the institution is doing a lot to appeal to those students. […] I feel like the efforts are there, it's just, it really does, culturally, take a good amount of time. I feel like it's changing, but then again I haven't been here in the past, but in terms of numbers, we definitely are increasing.

Campus programming events were mentioned by participants as a means of drawing a larger minority student population as well as challenging stereotypes held by White members of the campus community. Renee stated, "We had Cornel West, now this year we have Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Well, I think that's phenomenal because we have limited Black faculty or faculty of color anyway, so having imminent scholars and public intellectuals that are non-White come to the university is a way to shift so that students see that there are individuals across different ethnic identifications that are intellectuals, so we should continue with that. We have to continue the momentum."

In addition to formal events like bringing prolific scholars to campus, informal and student-organized events were also lauded. Panel discussions on topics such as the significance of hair in the African-American community were mentioned by one participant as a symbol of progress and inclusion. Additionally, race and ethnicity-based student organizations were noted as a critical resource for students on campus. These groups often emerge out of necessity as a response to a lack of formal resources geared toward the populations they represent. The Black Student Association (BSA), Herman@s Orgullos@s en Las Americas (HOLA), Muslim Student Association (MSA), and the newly-formed Native American Student Association (NASA) are a few of these student groups, many of which attend to the campus community and city community alike.[53]

Many faculty and staff members have also taken personal initiative to connect the campus and city communities, and cited this as an area to make improvements on multiple dimensions, such as university reputation, campus climate, and student recruitment. The AVID for Higher Education program, an established college readiness program for high school students, is now being tapped for identifying potential student recruits, though the perception of some faculty was that this avenue might have been explored by now. "The AVID program started at

least ten years ago, and UNCA is just recently in the last couple years, having the AVID students come. 95% of those students in the Asheville High program are accepted and go to four-year colleges; UNCA was not accepting them until now. You could ask students who were doing really well, "Has UNCA recruited you?", "No, I haven't heard anything" and, you know, they're on their way to [UNC Chapel Hill]." Nonetheless, many felt this to be an important step, and it is an ongoing initiative of the DAC, which aims for a cohort of 4-6 Asheville High School students to enter for the 2015-16 school year.[54]

Finally, a common proposal to make some campus-wide changes was to alter curricula in departments across the university. For individual programs, it was suggested that diversity principles be agreed upon and implemented in all courses, not just in those taught by faculty of color in order to ease the burden on these instructors and minimize the possibility of the perception or accusation by students that faculty members are operating under a personal agenda. Additionally, all students are currently required to take one Diversity Intensive (DI) course as part of the university's Liberal Arts Core, a grouping of classes all students must take. This was noted as an important requirement, though action may be taken to increase access to these courses and make their effects more salient. Renee posed the following questions:

> We have DI courses, but do we have them in all disciplines? And then are they truly DI from where we need them to be? Do they address a lot of these issues we're talking about? If a liberal arts institution is supposed to be about social justice and is supposed to be progressive and transformational and about having this orientation towards fairness and equality for all, then we need to make sure DI courses touch on that so that every student who comes through gets that, otherwise I think it's a huge disservice to the students. And maybe we should require more than one. Is one enough, because we're a liberal arts institution, to move students forward? Or have we really looked at the integration of the principles across the university? If we say we're liberal arts and we just have one DI class, great, but how are we integrating it outside of just those DI classes?"

Another route through which to implement these changes was identified in the university's Humanities program, a set of four courses required of all students and taught by faculty across a variety of disciplines. Humanities courses consist of a weekly common lecture given by rotating faculty members, and twice-weekly classroom sessions taught by a single instructor. Being that all students and many faculty have repeated contact with this area of the curriculum, and given its wide historical scope from the "classical world" to contemporary times, there are many ways for diverse topics to be integrated at this level. In the past, criticisms have been leveled at these courses for being too Eurocentric in their matter, and steps are now being taken to address this. Weekly lectures are expanding in scope to cover such topics as African cosmologies, and since professors have a level of agency in the books they incorporate, some are deciding to integrate more texts by non-Western scholars. Said one professor involved in these changes,

> I think the idea is for the curriculum changes to be permanent and to be transformational, so that the kinds of criticisms students have leveled in the past about the Humanities curriculum being too Eurocentric can fall away. So that the Humanities curriculum becomes known as a culturally diverse curriculum, as a curriculum that emphasizes different epistemologies. I mean this is radical pedagogy. I think this represents a potentially radical reimagining of the Humanities curriculum, but the difficult part is getting everybody on board, because there are folks who have been teaching this stuff in a particular way for decades, and the question becomes how do we really convince them that these changes are needed, beyond simply pointing to these terrible evaluations that students are writing?

Some participants expressed cynicism, but many seemed hopeful that these interventions might help frame UNCA's underrepresentation of people of color as a university issue, rather than an isolated problem for these individuals to resolve, which can cause further alienation. See Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of Themes by Participant

	Renee	Darrell	Denise	Malcolm	Rachel	Marissa	Derek	Paul	Thomas
Education Emphasized	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Racial Identity Emphasized	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
First Generation College Student	X	X	X				X		X
Perceptions of UNCA Did Not Match Reality	X	X		X	X	X			
Had Teaching/ Work Challenged	X	X		X		X			X
Negative Evaluations	X	X	X	X		X			
Need for Administrative Efforts	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Need for Student Organizations	X		X		X	X			
Need for Curricular Changes	X	X	X	X					

5. Discussion

5.1. A Critical Race Theory Analysis

Overall the findings of this study suggest that faculty and staff of color working in a predominantly White institution perceive themselves to have fundamentally different experiences from their White counterparts, and that these differences appear to be driven by the differential and reductive race-based perceptions of students and colleagues. In addition, changes at the institutional level were cited as critical in remedying these disparities. Some of the key themes that arose from participants' narratives were the emphasis on education and racial identity in their upbringing, the expression of racist and prejudiced ideology through anonymous and covert platforms, White institutional presence and students' distance from racialized identity markers, and lack of representation of people of color in high-ranking or tenured positions. Some of these findings are mirrored in the existing literature and point to a larger pattern of experiences, while others appear to uncover new trends and point toward potential areas for further scholarship.

In considering an emphasis on education from participants' families, the notion of meritocracy is both challenged and affirmed. Critical race theory does not necessarily support this idea that one's outcomes are a direct result of the amount of work and effort demonstrated by an individual, but rather recognizes that the already unequal access to certain social opportunities and benefits cannot be overcome by individual determination; however, most participants expressed that it was expected of them to pursue higher education and that it was posited as critical to their outcomes. As Renee expressed, she was aware of the "myth of meritocracy". Still, it was communicated to her that education would become her necessary tool for success. As evidenced in existing research and in the study at hand, many faculty of color do not have identical outcomes to White colleagues with the same efforts and qualifications. All faculty interviewed held doctorate degrees, but did not receive the same forthright perceptions of credibility. A CRT analysis might attribute this disparity to the acceptance and valorization of whiteness as the

standard, and the value of this quality in accessing institutional benefits. Pedagogical scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings considers the notion of "Whiteness as property" in assessing educational equity. Positing whiteness as a possession which may only be held by certain individuals, and which is used as an exclusive criterion for access to social benefits illustrates the structural barriers faced by people of color in the academic realm.[55]

Participants' early recognition of their position within the racial hierarchy also points to the permanence of racism as a structuring element of society. However, though they were aware of their oppressed social status, many also had racial pride instilled in them from a young age, presenting an important counter-narrative to the hegemonic accounts of people of color as inferior. In this way, being taught these qualities early on in conjunction with the social realities of marginalization may help foster an ability to persist under racist institutional norms; nonetheless it is the norms themselves that require critical analysis in order to enact meaningful, structural change.

In many ways these norms are made invisible through the more covert routes by which racism operates in the United States today. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* offers a comprehensive look at the development of colorblind ideology as an extension of the dominance of whiteness in its ability to erase and discredit the importance of race, due to the unmarked racial status of Whites.[56] In other words, just because race does not appear to operate significantly in the movements of White people throughout the world, this does not allow for the erasure of the racial identities that inform people of color's daily lives. As Denise articulated, "when we are colorblind, it's our color that is moved out of the center." Bonilla-Silva's ideas have also been applied to higher education research in order to analyze the ways in which researchers minimize the effects of racist institutional norms. Limiting the understanding of racism to overt, aggressive acts of prejudice and discrimination, the potential for racism to occur not as an individual act, but as an institutional structure is erased.[57] As such, institutional policies that contribute to the perpetuation of marginalization of people of color may go unnamed and unanalyzed in higher education research.

These covert means of expressing racist sentiments are very clearly demonstrated by the apparently prevalent use of anonymous student evaluations as a platform for these attitudes. In addition, one faculty member discussed overhearing a colleague announce that they are "just tired of talking about diversity" following an intentional absence from a committee meeting, and thus uninterested in improving the representation and experiences of people of color at UNCA, though they would not voice this opinion directly. The fact that students and colleagues seek out unidentifiable and passive-aggressive means of articulating these views demonstrates not that racism has disappeared, but that it has evolved. This is concurrent with national trends with regards to race relations. Racial hostility is no longer accepted by the majority, and though racism still exists in this form in some locations, it is much more common for it to occur subtly, and in many instances it has shifted from the individual perpetrator to the ingrained state of structural or institutional racism. As mentioned, this form can be difficult to detect, and even more so to combat.

Institutional racism may be understood as "structures, policies, practices, and norms resulting in differential access to goods, services, and opportunities of society by race."[58] As tenure in academia can be understood as a societal opportunity, and as research has consistently shown differential access to this opportunity across race, this disparity may be attributed to matters of institutional racism. Contributing policies and practices have been outlined in the devaluation of certain forms of research and extramural responsibilities taken on by faculty of color. Therefore, interventions to bridge these kinds of gaps must necessarily occur, at least in part, at the level of institutional policy and norms.

For meaningful, substantive, and sustainable changes to take place, they must be developed and implemented for the express purpose of addressing issues identified by underrepresented populations on campus, not just when it is convenient or beneficial for White people to do so, a phenomenon termed 'interest convergence'.[59] Existing narratives point to commitment and support from administrative leaders as a positive factor that influences climate and retention, suggesting the need for macro-level solutions regarding campus policies.[60] In assessing these implications for change at UNCA, university curricula present an area ripe with potential. Expanding Diversity Intensive courses to be present in all disciplines, and integrating diversity principles and critical pedagogical practices represent a possible intervention. The existing changes occurring with the hallmark Humanities program signify an emerging commitment to addressing long-standing criticisms of an integral piece of students' academic careers. Allotting equal attention to the historical contributions of non-Western and non-European peoples allows for the presentation of alternative histories to counter the hegemonic colonial narrative. Additionally, lending credence to different global ways of thinking offers a more well-rounded understanding, in keeping with the university's liberal arts programming.

5.2. Discrepancies

In a break from previous reports, faculty and staff interviewed at UNCA did not mention isolation and alienation as a pertinent theme in their experiences. This, of course, does not mean that they do not experience it. This may be influenced by the interdisciplinary liberal arts focus of the university, as well as its small physical and population size. Most of the existing research has been conducted on faculty and staff from large research-oriented universities. Not only do these institutions have differing values, the small size of UNCA may allow for less of a stark contrast in representation and less separation from other faculty. For example, although one may be the only person of color in a department at UNC Asheville, that department on the whole may only have as few as three faculty to begin with, so the isolation from colleagues may not be as present. Additionally, the small population leads to smaller class sizes, and the teaching focus of the institution necessitates more interaction with students, perhaps lessening this effect as well. The role institution type and size play in these experiences may be an area for future research to explore, which may reveal some departure from the most widely-presented narratives and uncover other potential resiliency factors.

Additionally, the notion of students distancing themselves from their racial identity or from other people of color on campus represents a divergence with the existing literature. While student organizations were still noted as an important presence, these students seem to represent a minority as far as the number of students interested in affiliating with and rallying around their racial identity. This differs from what is presented in research, which documents the importance of mentorships and community supports, as well as from the experiences of the faculty and staff, whose racial identities were presented as integral to their sense of self. Malcolm noted that this trend may, at the very least, point to the increasingly varied ways in which African-Americans and other people of color are choosing to self-identify in the United States, which has been documented nationally. A study with more of a student focus might lend more insight into some basis for this dynamic.

Some differences between participants emerged as well. There appeared to be some generational differences, particularly with regard to the potential for progress at UNC Asheville. Senior faculty members who had been with the university for quite some time expressed cynicism about the efforts they have seen. They identified the installation of a new Chancellor and Provost as the most potentially positive prospect for the university. However, most junior faculty and staff felt hopeful about future changes taking place through curriculum adjustments and student organizing.

The findings also suggest that there may be some distinctions between faculty and staff experiences along gender lines as well. This is supported in the literature, and was mentioned by three participants in passing as a trend that is definitely present. However, because questions were more focused toward racial experiences, no questions explicitly concerning gender were posed to women participants, and specific instances of gendered and racialized interactions were not consistently discussed. A more holistic study of faculty and staff across dimensions of underrepresentation might offer more detail on these distinctions.

6. Conclusion

This case study of faculty and staff of color at UNC Asheville sought to examine the social narratives of these individuals and draw together common themes of importance. In collecting and analyzing these social narratives, themes of marginalization and hardship emerged with regards to these faculty and staff members' experiences on a predominantly White campus. Incidents of interpersonal microaggression, anonymous racial criticisms, and professional difficulties colored many participants' narratives. However, this work also necessarily incorporates potential strategies and avenues for positive change for the university. It is my sincere hope, and that of the involved faculty and staff, that the sharing of these narratives can provide context for the experiences of underrepresented groups and prompt meaningful dialogue to instigate changes that better the outcomes of all campus community members, students, faculty, and staff alike.

7. Acknowledgments

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