

Investigating Ivy: Black Undergraduate Students at Select Ivy League Institutions

Sharron Scott^{1*}, Jennifer M. Johnson¹, Ayana T. Hardaway², & Tiffany N. Galloway³

¹ Temple University

² Stanford University

³ University of Houston

Abstract

This qualitative study examined how race and class shaped the college choice process and collegiate experiences of 14 Black undergraduate students attending four Ivy League institutions. Semi-structured interviews were analyzed through the lens of critical race theory and sociocultural theory. Findings revealed how the interrelatedness of race, ethnicity, and social class status shaped college choice and collegiate experiences. Access to robust financial aid packages motivated students' decision to apply, yet social class status contributed to continued financial hardships while enrolled. Racial identity was largely viewed by participants as a vehicle to admit more Black immigrant students than Black native students in order to achieve institutional diversity goals, contributing to the underrepresentation of Black native students on campus. Prevalent racialized incidents and institutional racism shaped participants' collegiate experiences. The findings of this study have implications for minority recruitment, college choice, access, and equity, as well as higher education diversity initiatives at Ivy League institutions and other predominantly White institutions.

* Contact: sharron.scott@temple.edu



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Introduction

For decades, researchers have studied the ways in which universities are increasing the numbers of Black students at majority-White colleges and Ivy League institutions are no exception. Given that undergraduate education is a direct route to increased social capital and the fact that American Ivy League institutions possess a great wealth of social and professional resources, it is vital and necessary for these institutions to improve the enrollment rates of this particular population (Chapman et al., 2018; Reed, 2005). As of 2017, Black students within the Ivy League made up 9% of freshmen and only 15% of college-age Americans (Ashkenas et al., 2017). More recent data suggests an upward trend in admitting a higher proportion of Black students amid the political unrest and protests surrounding the 2020 death of George Floyd. For example, a report in the *New York Times* highlights admission trends at Harvard University, which shows that the proportion of admitted students who are Black jumped to 18% from 14.8% the previous year (Hartocollis, 2021). Despite the increasing number of Black students enrolled in college, Black native students (students born and raised in the United States) remain underrepresented at Ivy League and other highly selective institutions in comparison to their Black immigrant peers. At selective colleges and universities, Black immigrants or children of immigrants (individuals of the Diaspora including Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America who were born outside of the United States) represent up to a quarter of the Black students enrolled (Glenn, 2007). Within the Black immigrant population admitted to the Ivy Leagues, Caribbean Black immigrants made up the largest group representing 43.1%, followed by African immigrants at 28.6%, Latin American immigrants at 7.4%, and other regions representing 20.8% respectively (Massey et al., 2007).

Although these groups are all viewed as “Black” in the United States, scholars note that historical and cultural differences within the Black community ultimately shape college choice processes and collegiate experiences among Black students, a topic which has not been fully explored in the literature (George Mwangi, 2014; Griffin & McIntosh, 2015). Research focused on exploring the experiences of Black native students attending Ivy League institutions serves to also highlight policies and practices that can increase minority student representation at Ivy League institutions and other predominantly White institutions. Following a phenomenological approach, the research questions guiding this qualitative study are:

1. Based upon students' experiences, what role does race and class play in the college choice decisions of Black undergraduates attending Ivy League institutions?
2. How does race and class shape the collegiate experiences of Black undergraduate students attending Ivy League institutions?

The findings from this study contribute to the existing literature by adding nuance to our understanding of “Black” college students and informs institutions of higher education of strategies for the continued enrollment and support of Black students. This research fills the gap in the literature by focusing on long-standing diversity issues on American college campuses.

Review of the Literature

The current literature base about Black students in higher education oftentimes fails to differentiate representation by ethnicity or national origin (Griffin & McIntosh, 2015). Most of this work has emphasized the differences between Black and White college student enrollment and achievement (Massey et al., 2007). Other studies explore the notion of “oppositional culture” as a likely culprit for the attendance disparities between Black immigrants, children of Black immigrants, and Black native students at American colleges and universities (Downey & Ainsworth-Darnell, 2002; Mangino, 2013). Developed as a means to examine the long-standing achievement gap between Black and White students, Ogbu’s (1991) theory on oppositional culture posits that Black American students do not anticipate receiving access to or equality in American education, causing some Black American students to devalue education and associated opportunities. Moreover, Ogbu describes “voluntary minorities” as immigrants who relocated to the United States with expectations of a brighter future for themselves and their children. Conversely, “involuntary minorities” (such as enslaved individuals and their descendants) did not arrive of their own volition. For involuntary minorities, the oppressive forces which brought them to the United States are viewed as the same systems and structures that prevent their social and economic success. Over time, Black peoples’ continued experiences with racism lead to native populations of color losing faith in the possibility of upward mobility through education (Skerrett, 2006). Bennett and Lutz (2009) however, found that the importance of oppositional culture in the educational outcomes of Black students has been overemphasized in explaining the educational successes of Black immigrants vis-à-vis Black native undergraduates. Thus, the ambiguity surrounding the racial identity, college choice process, and collegiate experiences within the population of Black undergraduates warrants further interrogation.

Racial Identity

Scholars have highlighted the linkages between race and college-going aspirations among Black students (Goings & Sewell, 2019; Van Camp et al., 2010). Black racial identity became less fluid following shifts in immigration policies whereas cities and communities across the United States experienced a wave of Black migration from the Caribbean, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa (Massey et al., 2007). However, since the 1980s, the number of foreign-born and first- and second-generation children has been steadily increasing, with Black immigrants representing a substantial percentage of Black people in the United States. Due to a shared racial identity, research has

included these newly arriving Black students within the broader context of Blackness in American colleges (George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015).

The ambiguity surrounding Blackness stems from data systems, such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS), being unable to distinguish between Black students with different ethnic origins, as well as the inability of these systems to indicate how many generations a student's family has been in the United States (Allen, 2017). Across contemporary higher education literature, Black natives are defined as Black students for whom themselves and both of their parents were born in the United States. Conversely, Black immigrants include students born abroad or those with at least one foreign-born parent (Massey et al., 2007). Black immigrants' identity includes both their race and ethnicity as well as shared experiences tied to their native land which adds a layer to their identity and that of their children. However, for both Black immigrant and Black native undergraduates, race and ethnicity are salient and largely influence their experiences in college and the college selection process (Griffin & McIntosh, 2015). In contrast, when placed on a hierarchy, ethnic identity is deemed more salient than race among foreign-born Black students. This may possibly be due to the latter's less understanding of Black history in the United States which bears on educational decision-making and may add to Black immigrants' belief in the possibility of overcoming racial oppression through educational achievement (George Mwangi, 2014). Conversely, Massey et al., (2007) reported that traits related to Black immigrants such as ambition and a focus on social mobility could be tied to college selection. Given these ambiguities, a more in-depth exploration of the experiences of Black undergraduate students will allow for the removal of assumed group racial sameness and examine the possible varying experiences of Black immigrants and Black natives and how racial identity impacts their college choice process.

Influences on the College Choice Process among Black Students

While scholars note the importance of acknowledging the sociological influences on the college choice process, much of the literature surrounding college choice uses Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three phase model. The model notes predisposition, search, and choice as the phases through which students think about and are influenced to ultimately choose which institution of higher education is the best fit for them. Although this model has served as an important theoretical lens, scholars who focus on Black students and their college choices critique this model for its lack of an understanding of Black students at both ends of the socioeconomic scale (Chapman et al., 2018), as well as the influence of racial barriers on college choice (Goings & Sewell, 2019). The phenomenon of "undermatching" (Smith et al., 2013), in which students attend post-secondary institutions that are less prestigious than their academic profiles warrant, is also a consistent theme across literature when it comes to understanding college choice decisions among Black students (Chapman et al., 2018; Goings & Sewell, 2019).

Understanding Patterns of College Choice within the Black Community

Few scholars have examined what might account for the overrepresentation of Black immigrant students in comparison to Black native students at American Ivy League institutions (McCleary-Gaddy & Miller, 2018). One of the most comprehensive studies exploring the racial/ethnic differences in Black college students' experiences was completed by Massey, Mooney, Torres, and Charles. Drawing upon data from a cohort of 28 selective colleges and universities in fall 1997 through the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen, Massey et al. (2007) found that there were modest differences in the social origins of Black immigrant students and Black native students. For example, with respect to indicators such as socioeconomic status, peer support, parental employment, academic preparation, and academic achievement, these two groups were almost identical. Some of the few differences noted included that Black immigrant fathers were more likely to have graduated college and held advanced degrees. Additional differences were that Black immigrants were more likely to come from a two-parent household and some immigrant children have access to the capital to attend safer, better resourced schools in the private sector.

Massey et al. (2007) theorized three possible explanations for the overrepresentation of Black immigrants at Ivy League institutions. The first explanation suggests statistical discrimination, or the process of employing favoritism toward Black immigrants over Black natives in the admissions process. This favoritism would be caused by the pervasiveness of implicit and explicit bias against Black natives in the United States. The second explanation is that objective characteristics (grade point average, test scores, etc.), might make Black immigrants more competitive applicants than Black natives. The third explanation suggests that stereotypes about the academic success of children of immigrants might explain the preferences for second-generation Black immigrants over Black natives. These explanations have not been re-examined in the contemporary context. Collectively the review of the literature establishes an understanding of Black racial identity, college choice considerations, and the collegiate similarities and differences between Black immigrant and Black native students attending Ivy League institutions. There is, however, space to contribute to the discourse about both the college choice process and the overrepresentation of Black immigrants at Ivy League institutions.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories are used to help understand the ways race and class shape the college choices and campus experiences of Black undergraduate students: Critical Race Theory and sociocultural theory. Critical race theory (CRT) is an analytical perspective that has been used to explore the ways racism explicitly and implicitly shapes social practices and policies embedded in educational systems (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT is a useful lens for this research because it offers a critique of the systems of power and privilege that shape college admission practices and the experiences of minority students attend-

ing predominantly White institutions. With a focus on Black undergraduates attending Ivy League institutions and their college choice decisions and experiences, we utilized three tenets of CRT: the colorblind philosophy, interest convergence, and counter-storytelling. Through CRT's tenet of colorblindness, White people claim that "color" or "race" does not impact their daily lives and interactions with non-White people (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This effectively renders the lived experiences of persons of color invisible and serves to invalidate individuals as they express experiencing incidents of racial discrimination. Interest convergence holds that racism advances the interests of White people, so consequently, White people have little incentive to eradicate racism (Stefancic & Delgado, 2012). This tenet can be used to analyze motivations to recruit and admit Black students at Ivy League institutions. In conjunction, the CRT tenet of counter-storytelling encourages the centering of the perspectives of communities that are often marginalized, in recognition of the ways discourses can omit and thereby silence the experiences of people of color (Stefancic & Delgado, 2012). Focusing on the sub-population of Black native students elevates these perspectives when exploring collegiate experiences in the Ivy League that may be overshadowed simply by focusing on "Black students" or minority students attending predominantly White institutions.

Supplementing this framework, we expand on Anyon's (1981) sociocultural theory to examine how class status shaped the experiences of the Black undergraduates in this study. Educational institutions have been critiqued for privileging the knowledge and ways of knowing of middle-class students (Johnson, 2017). Sociocultural theory asserts that schools replicate and reproduce the social class conflicts of the larger society. Consequently, for Black students from working class backgrounds, there may be additional challenges associated with navigating the social and cultural norms of Ivy League institutions. One's access to the social and cultural capital of an institution and the individuals therein may shape their perceptions of the utility of attending a highly selective institution and the experiences therein. Thus, sociocultural theory is particularly germane in this study, given that the participants are students attending a highly selective institution and come from socioeconomic backgrounds that are different from the majority of the campus population.

Methodology

This study utilized qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to explore the college choice process and collegiate experiences of Black undergraduates attending Ivy League institutions. According to Kordes and Klauser (2017), first-person narratives are needed to study human experiences. This study utilized a phenomenological approach, a design of inquiry where the researcher captures a sense of the lived experiences of a group of individuals who experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Salient emerging themes as reported by the participants have meaning and are likely to be similar across experiences. This research design was informed by the theoretical perspectives of CRT and sociocultural theory.

Recruitment

Interviews were conducted between February and March 2020 and a \$25 gift card was offered for participation. Purposeful sampling was used to identify individuals who met the criterion for inclusion in the study: undergraduate students at Ivy League institutions who identified as Black or African American. This sampling technique focuses on selecting information-rich cases, suitable for understanding the research questions under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Information about the study was posted on social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) and shared via email with campus offices and student organizations at eight Ivy League institutions: Barnard, Brown, Columbia, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale. There were 32 respondents to the call for participants; these individuals were invited to complete a demographic questionnaire to confirm eligibility. Fourteen individuals met the criteria and were scheduled for semi-structured interviews with a member of the research team. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Participants

Participant demographics are summarized in Table 1. The participants included four males and 10 females ranging in age from 19 to 23 years old. All participants were current undergraduate students attending an Ivy League institution in the Northeastern region of the United States. Participants' academic majors included: African American Studies (n=3), Anthropology (n=1), Computer Science (n=1), Economics (n=2), Mechanical Engineering (n=1), Neuroscience (n=1), Political Science (n=2), Public Health (n=1), Sociology (n=1), and Urban Studies (n=1).

Prior to attending an Ivy League institution, six participants attended private high schools, seven attended public high schools, and one was homeschooled. While all participants identified as Black/African American, seven participants additionally reported their ethnic identities: four identified as of West-Indian descent and three identified as of African descent; one participant identified as multi-racial (Black and White) and one identified as Black Mexican. Of the 14 participants, eight reported that at least one parent was born outside the United States (Barbados, Cameroon, Ghana, Haiti, Jamaica, Senegal, Trinidad). One participant reported being born outside the United States (Ghana). Thirteen of the 14 participants reported that at least one parent had attended college.

Table 1 on next page.

Table 1: Summary of Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Institution	Racial Identity	Participant Country of Birth	Parent(s) Country of Birth	A Parent Attended College	High School Type
Andre	Columbia	Black	U.S.	U.S.	Yes	Public & Private
Angela	Columbia	Black	U.S.	U.S.	No	Public
Brea	Penn	Black/West Indian	U.S.	Barbados and Trinidad	Yes	Public
Crystal	Brown	Black	U.S.	U.S.	Yes	Private
David	Columbia	Black	Ghana	Ghana	No	Public
Denise	Barnard	Black	U.S.	U.S.	Yes	Public
Elena	Columbia	Black & Mexican	U.S.	U.S.	Yes	Private
Kalil	Columbia	Black	U.S.	Jamaica	Yes	Home-schooled
Layla	Columbia	Black	U.S.	Jamaica	Yes	Private
Nasir	Princeton	Multiracial	U.S.	Senegal	Yes	Public
Raven	Columbia	Black	U.S.	U.S.	Yes	Private
Rosie	Princeton	Black	U.S.	Jamaica	Yes	Public
Shaniece	Columbia	Black	U.S.	Cameroon	Yes	Public
Vanessa	Barnard	Black Haitian	U.S.	Haiti	Yes	Private

Data Collection

The two senior members of the research team conducted interviews via phone or video conference technology with the 14 participants. Interviews offer participants the opportunity to share their experiences with an individual with the expectation that their experiences will be advantageous to others (Carter et al., 2008). The two researchers met to co-construct and normalize the 24-question interview protocol based on a review of the literature and the theoretical framework of the study. Each interview began with background information including secondary schooling experiences, academic goals, and family dynamics. Sample questions include: *How do you racially and ethnically identify and why? What role did finances play in your consideration to attend your institution? Have you had one or more racialized experiences at your institution? Do you feel like you belong at your institution? Why? What is the racial composition in most of your classes? How do you feel about it?* Subsequent open-ended questions were asked to allow deeper analysis into student's college choices, intentions, and lived experiences while attending college. Interviews with each participant lasted approximately 90 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed by hand.

Analysis

Using the research questions as a guide and following a phenomenological approach, themes were identified in the narratives to unpack the lived experiences of Black students attending select Ivy League institutions. First, the transcripts from the interviews were uploaded into the Dedoose qualitative software package. The researchers read the transcripts and created analytic memos to document perceptions of the emergent patterns, categories, and concepts embedded within the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2009). The researchers reviewed the transcripts, noting evidence of the ways participants articulated the interconnectedness of race and class in their educational experiences and perceptions of the campus community. The team engaged in two analytical strategies simultaneously: deductive coding to analyze data relevant to the research topic and inductive coding to capture additional information relevant to the participants' experiences (Saldaña, 2009). A coding scheme was developed that listed and defined specific categories of interest. Deductive coding was used to identify segments of the text that aligned with the literature and theoretical framework. Open coding was used to identify concepts that emerged from the data that were not a part of the established coding scheme. These codes were organized into broad categories that were used to capture the recurring patterns that emerged from the participants' experiences. The researchers identified recurring patterns and collapsed the broader categories into four categories of data that became the themes for this study. Respondent quotes that aligned with specific patterns were selected for manuscript inclusion. Taken together, these strategies allowed the researchers to move from a general to specific level of analysis to report compelling elements of data (Saldaña, 2009; Wicks, 2017).

Trustworthiness

The research team engaged in several strategies to enhance the confirmability, reliability, credibility, and transferability of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, the research team reflected on and acknowledged how our biases shaped the study. The research team is composed of a diverse group of educational professionals including three terminal degree holders and three graduate students interested in exploring a range of phenomena related to college student equity. Our experiences navigating higher education and awareness of differing outcomes of Black college students shaped our interests in engaging in this study.

The authors engaged in peer debriefing to increase the trustworthiness of this research. The six-member team met weekly to discuss the design of the study, data collection process, and data analysis strategies. The two lead researchers conducted the participant interviews and completed the initial analysis of data using Dedoose. After the initial themes were identified, the team discussed the salience of the themes as they related to previous research. Additionally, we maintained a log of the study's methods and procedures as an audit trail documenting the rationale for various decisions made during the study. This resulted in the reporting of thick, rich, descriptions of participants and the inclusion of direct quotes. To ensure validity, member-checking was conducted to allow participants the opportunity to engage with data from their semi-structured interviews. All 14 participants were contacted to request additional information to address any inconsistencies between the demographic questionnaire completed and interview responses. Moreover, we requested information from participants to clarify their identifying pronouns to ensure that their narratives were accurately reported in the manuscript.

Findings

Data analysis revealed four central themes that emerged from this study: (a) favorable funding, (b) dubious diversity, (c) being Black on campus, and (d) race residuals. In the first theme participants describe how attractive and robust financial aid packages ultimately swayed their college choice decision, yet many continued to experience financial hardship as students. The second theme focuses on participants' thoughts about the appearance of diversity on campus. They discuss their racial identity and their views about the underrepresentation of Black native students and overrepresentation of Black immigrant students on their Ivy League campuses. The third theme highlights how participants simultaneously experience tokenism and marginalization as students on campus. The final theme focuses on how participants personally experienced racialized incidents on campus while interacting with peers and staff.

Favorable Funding with a Caveat

Eleven of the participants attributed their choice to attend an Ivy League institution to the comprehensive financial aid packages offered. As explained by Nasir, a Princeton

University undergraduate, “You can't go somewhere if you can't pay for it.” Elena at Columbia University readily explained, “I ended up choosing Columbia because of the great financial aid package.” Coupled with the prestige and expectations for a positive post-graduate quality of life granted by attending an Ivy League institution, many participants viewed accepting the packages as a “no brainer.” Rosie, David, Khalil, Layla, and Denise echoed this sentiment. Rosie, a Princeton University student, shared, “Financial aid was the biggest thing. It was the cheapest option for me...so really the prestige of Princeton and the financial aid was so good, it was kind of like a no brainer.” Vanessa, attending Barnard College stated, “I knew even at a young age that going to an Ivy would set you up for life. It's the best of the best.” Additionally, twelve participants had at least one parent who completed college, and described the ways their parents emphasized education as critical to economic stability. Here, we can see a clear perception of attending an Ivy League institution as being an economical investment, and an investment in their social and cultural capital. Attending a prestigious Ivy League institution was seen as a way to advance their socioeconomic status beyond that achieved by their family.

However, despite the generous financial aid offerings, participants highlighted how economic challenges rendered them surprisingly vulnerable to financial hardships. For example, David and Andre describe the hidden costs and added financial stressors experienced by themselves and other lower income students who work multiple jobs in order to pay the student portion of their cost of attendance. They also reflected on the limited role the institutions played in addressing these issues. When asked about his experiences with funding his undergraduate studies, Andre shared that while Columbia “looks good on paper, you would still be required to work to pay off the student contribution which is like \$3,000...and so this ‘full scholarship’ is misleading.” The “student contribution” that Andre is referring to is prevalent at other Ivy League institutions such as Cornell University, Yale University, Dartmouth College, and Brown University (Skinner, 2018). This student contribution requires that students work, often during the summer and regular academic semesters, as a part of their financial aid package. In addition to having to work, students also grappled with other unexpected academic and social and financial obligations while attending college such as expenses to travel abroad or money to dine off-campus with friends. While participants’ college choice process, as revealed above, was impacted by the best financial aid package offered, there becomes a clear separation between students who are also employees at their institution and students who get to just be students (i.e., those who do not need financial aid). This perpetuates significant class differences between students who can afford to attend Ivy League institutions outright and students who otherwise struggle to be able to attend without some form of financial aid.

Dubious Diversity

The second major theme of this study captured beliefs about enrollment patterns which suggest that there is an underrepresentation of Black native students and an overrepres-

entation of Black immigrant or Black international undergraduates on Ivy League campuses. The researchers acknowledge that while participants' understanding of their institutional enrollment processes might be limited and subjective, we share their views as counterstories in alignment with CRT to understand how they perceive Black representation on their respective campuses. For example, Crystal, who attends Brown University, shared, "It feels like we have more immigrant students than African Americans." Similarly, David, who attends Columbia, shared his observations about Black enrollment patterns on his campus, "I think that the university likes having an international community on campus. I think this is the reason why they recruit slightly more for Africans than African Americans students." Layla, a senior at Columbia, associated her perceptions about enrollment patterns to socioeconomic status: "If anything, I think they're making more of an effort with African students given that a lot of them are wealthier."

Viewed through a CRT perspective, "little happens out of altruism alone" (Stefancic & Delgado, 2012, p. 23). The concept of interest convergence becomes relevant in exploring observations and views of diversity on their respective campuses. There were a few participants who linked these recruitment patterns to the larger historical context of White supremacy and race relations within the United States. From their view, such recruitment patterns serve to advance the interests and agenda of a White patriarchal system which allows for a select "chosen" few who demonstrate the appropriate values to access these elite spaces. These practices are reflected in Nasir's comments, who observed,

Between American White people and American Black people, there's a pretty conspicuous thing, [a] complicated history which has many scars left unhealed ... [and] because of that complication, the University [Princeton] sees it easier, and the United States might see it easier, to not want to interact with the other side of that history.

Engaging an equally critical lens, Denise discusses the shift in recruitment patterns during the turn of the twentieth century. She observed, "They [White people] transitioned to schools like private schools not feeling confident that Black Americans would be able to fit into the college system, especially poor Black Americans." These recruitment strategies created some division and tension within the Black community on campus. When asked to elaborate, Denise continued,

I definitely think my school [Barnard] does recruit certain Black identities specifically. At least amongst a lot of students, we talk about how African American students as an identity are not represented nearly as much as other identities are - specifically African immigrants and Caribbean immigrants.

Participants also shared what they believed Ivy League institutions look for in students to fill campus diversity and recruitment goals. . This was apparent to Brea at the University of Pennsylvania, a college located within a low-income, predominantly Black neighborhood. She observed, "Most of their Black students come from predominantly

White high schools rather than predominantly Black high schools, and the Black students that are in those higher-ranked high schools tend to be immigrants for whatever reason.” In terms of the ‘type of Black student’ recruited at Ivy League institutions, Kalil noted, “Even if Columbia doesn’t sit down and say ‘we want African and Caribbean students’ they want them because they believe these students have a better understanding of the education system and they also represent a higher class of Black students.” Estimating the representation of Black students on campus, Andre shared, “[there is] disproportion, whereas Black students only make up like 6% of the college itself and then of Black students, African Americans themselves are like 1% of that 6%.” Participant observations in this study support what Massey et al. (2007) theorized as statistical discrimination to help explain the perceived overrepresentation of Black immigrants at Ivy League institutions. Participants’ comments, however, reveal the perception that Black native students are underrepresented at Ivy League institutions, particularly Black native students from modest or low-income families.

Being Black on Campus

Building from concerns about the representation of Black students on campus, there were also concerns about how this limited representation impacted their classroom experiences and led to experiences of tokenism and marginalization. When asked about the racial make-up of students in most of her classes, Rosie, an anthropology major responded, “In our small classes of like 10 to 15 students there's usually like two Blacks. And like the rest of the class, I would say Asian and South Asian, Eastern South Asian take up most of the racial population.” For Crystal, a neuroscience major, the racial composition at her institution is salient, “I think for most of my classes it is maybe 25% White, 30% Asian, 5% or less Black, and then the remaining percent are other ethnicities.” Similar to previous research about Black student experiences on predominantly White campuses, the pervasiveness of Whiteness inside the classroom not only rendered participants in this study more vulnerable to experiencing social isolation, discrimination, and tokenism, but it resulted in an overall sense that campus diversity was lacking (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Strayhorn, 2009).

As several participants described their experiences of being one of the few, if not the only, Black student(s) in their classes, the salience of their Blackness became particularly acute in majors where Black students are often underrepresented. Because some participants in this research reported as the only Black students in a particular space, they are often required to speak for the entire Black race. When asked about the racial makeup of students in most of her classes, as an economics major, Brea lamented,

It’s discouraging when you have to speak in front of the class because you’re tokenized, like, “that’s how everyone of your race feels.” Especially if there’s no other Black person that regularly speaks up. They put you in this box of, “that’s how someone that looks like you feel about the subject.”

Similarly, David, a political science major, shared,

There is the expectation that because I'm the only Black student in the class, I have a stronger opinion, or I have something to say, which of course I do, but the expectation can sometimes get annoying. Especially since I don't speak on behalf of the entire Black community.

Nasir, an engineering student, shared his experience in being one of the few Black students in a classroom and having his perspectives invalidated. He reflected, "there's been plenty of instances of my voice not being respected in class, being spoken over, being treated by classmates as if I don't know what I'm talking about, or don't have valid knowledge." Brea, David, and Nasir's experience in feeling tokenized are similar to findings from Strayhorn's (2009) study on Black student experiences at a predominately White institution, where students described having to prove their intellectual aptitude and dispel dominant stereotypes about Black culture. These feelings of hypervisibility and tokenism were often minimized by peers who asserted that they were "colorblind" and did not view their Black classmates as "different" within educational spaces which prevented opportunities to discuss the short-term and long-term implications of having limited representation of diverse Black voices on campus (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Their reflections also revealed the importance of recognizing diversity within the Black identity. Although the participants all identified as Black, some share a salient connection to a racial ethnicity. Failure to acknowledge ethnic identity assumes racial sameness (George Mwangi, 2014).

Race Residuals

The fourth theme that emerged pertains to participants' sharing some of the racialized incidents experienced on the campus of their Ivy League institution. Each participant could describe racially charged incidents on their campus that they experienced or were aware of, and viewed campus racism as commonplace. Their authority on assessing racially charged incidents as "racism" reflects the assertion in CRT that the lived experiences of people of color gives them the competence to identify and speak up on such issues (Stefancic & Delgado, 2012). These incidents ranged from racial micro-aggressions to suspicions about having the academic merit to attend an Ivy League institution. David, a Black immigrant from Ghana explained,

I've had people insinuate that the only reason I came to the University [Columbia] was through Affirmative Action or for diversity reasons and not because of any sort of merit... It was disheartening to hear that from a student at a university that touts itself as being this liberal institution.

Binkley (2017) argues that Ivy League institutions will continue to defend their right to consider race in admissions practices. While these policies may serve to right the wrongs of the past, David's experience highlights how such policies negatively impact how he is perceived on campus. Assumptions of Affirmative Action admittance were also reported in the classroom by several participants. David described one salient incident of racism in the classroom,

I've had a lot of people just assume that I was on a sports team - which I'm not. When I tell people I'm not on a sports team, they appear shocked and then they would ask, "Well how did you get here?"

For David and others, classmates did not view them as qualified to be an Ivy League student. In this case, the word "qualified" does not actually pertain to qualifications but instead to "fit" within a particular campus community (Gasman et al., 2015).

Participants also encountered racism outside the classroom through regular interactions with peers, faculty, and staff. As Kalil explained, "It's a weird environment that we're in. It's a very dramatic experience. A lot of the day-to-day interactions are informed by race." Additionally, Rosie shared her experiences of struggling in a science class and how her advisor discouraged her from continuing in the field, "She suggested that it was maybe too hard to deal with and I should do African American Studies instead. I felt like, if I was a White student, she wouldn't have suggested African American Studies." Shaniece also experienced racially charged interactions with her advisor who informed her that "there's not a lot of professional Black men available to you."

Racism on the Ivy League campus itself, outside of academics, was experienced by Angela, Rosie, Crystal, and Andre. While residing in her college dormitory Angela reported,

I've had noise complaints made about me when I wasn't even on the floor. I've had people make derogatory comments about my hair or my religion, or people criminalizing my friends for being in the lounge... Things that I do that are uniquely Black bother people disproportionately.

Racism in campus sports was also reported. Rosie, who endeavored to participate on a university sports team, recalled, "my coach was always way harder on me than anyone else. I was the only Black [person]. I ended up dropping out the first semester." Rosie further revealed that when she emailed her coach, "she apologized and said that she doesn't notice color and that she didn't even notice that I was the only Black person on the team." Rosie's response highlights CRT's tenet of colorblindness. In this sense, her experiences as a Black person are rendered invisible because her White peers and coaches chose not to see race as important or relevant to understanding someone's experiences.

While walking around their respective Ivy League campuses, Andre and Crystal each reported racialized experiences. Crystal recalled that she and a friend had to show their campus IDs while walking towards their Brown University dormitory although other White students were not required to do the same. Andre shared, "I had people double checking my ID to make sure that I went to school there which was kinda weird, well it wasn't kinda weird, it was racist. We know why that happened." As evidenced above, the participants experienced a host of racialized incidents including but not limited to notions of suspicions about merit, racial profiling, and microaggressions. Although participants largely reported racialized incidents in the classroom, there were multiple

experiences of racially charged interactions across each of the Ivy League campuses.

Discussion and Implications

Through the use of CRT and sociocultural theory as frames of analysis, the present study sought to examine how race and class shaped the college choice process and collegiate experiences of Black undergraduates attending Ivy League institutions. The findings revealed that while the social class mobility associated with attending an Ivy League institution played a role in participants' college choice process, financial aid packages were critical in their selection to attend an elite university. The themes that emerged from this study also illuminates hidden costs and possible barriers for undergraduate students attending selective universities as the findings suggest that affordability and financial hardships are experienced by students across social classes. University administrators need to take these barriers into consideration for matriculated students and identify modes of support for students by making campus resources and advisors available. Future research studies should further examine the relationship between the intersections of students' race and socioeconomic backgrounds and their collegiate experiences at elite campuses.

The results of this study provide compelling evidence that racial identity was used as a vehicle by Ivy League institutions to recruit and admit more Black students, including ethnically diverse Black students. Regardless of ethnic identity, participants in this study experienced racism on both micro and macro levels which shaped their overall collegiate experiences. Additionally, the participants' social class status combined with their racial identity to influence their interactions with others on campus. This study provides nuanced insights about how consideration of the unique experience and needs of Black undergraduate students might be applied to developing models of support for this population. In their attempts to ensure that their campuses are diverse and inclusive, institutional administrators at Ivy League institutions must take into account the racial, ethnic, and social class background of each potential student in order to fulfill their commitment to provide a supportive environment for greater retention and engagement for all students.

Conclusion

George Mwangi and Fries–Britt (2015) highlight the importance of examining diversity within-groups by focusing on Black college students' ethnicity and nativity – what they describe as Black within Black. Our research has shown that despite the efforts of selective universities to increase the diversity of their student bodies, perceptions about recruitment patterns continue to reify and perpetuate disadvantage by socioeconomic status and ethnicity. For those interested in increasing minority student representation at Ivy League institutions, it is important for institutions to consider the interconnectedness of race, ethnicity, and class, as such rich perspectives and experiences should be reflected within the academic community.

The overrepresentation of Black immigrant and Black international undergraduate students on Ivy League campuses, as observed by participants in this study, combined with the continued underrepresentation of Black native students, have enabled students to raise critically important questions about access to the best universities in America. The use of intentional and effective models of support by Ivy League institutions might help in mitigating the negative and toxic institutional environments and thereby contribute to the successful acclimation of Black collegiate students. The implications of this study point to a continued need for more inclusive recruitment efforts, and strategic interventions that are designed for the needs of Black undergraduate students.

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