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# AFRICAN-AMERICANS WITH DOCTORAL DEGREES IN MUSIC FROM PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES REGARDING MICROAGGRESSIONS AND RACISM

by

JEFFREY DEON HUGHLEY

(Under the Direction of Alison Farley)

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to discover the issues of racial microaggression, as perceived by African Americans who earned doctoral degrees in music from predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), in order to better understand the perceptions and lived experiences of African-American students in regard to unequal and racist treatment from the personnel at PWIs in the U.S. South. Members of this particular population were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. Based on the themes from the interview responses, (a) the existence of White privilege was found to be a common occurrence for all of the participants, (b) both particular instances of microaggression and a general climate of microaggression were experienced by the participants, and, (c) microaggressions were experienced with faculty in classroom and advising contexts and in general with peers in the program. Participants noted that the PWIs’ attempts to address microaggressions were chaotic and ineffective, due in large part to poor communication and policy enforcement.

INDEX WORDS: Critical race theory, Microaggressions, Racial microaggressions, Racism

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my late parents, Dorothy Hughley and Harold France. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving godparents, Willie and Faye Haygood, whose words of encouragement and push for persistence ring in my ears. My sisters August Haygood, Cristi Haygood, Toni Hughley, and Kimberly Vann have never left my side and are very special. A special thanks to my mentors Dr. Myra Rhoden, Dr. Demondrae Thurman, Dr. Horace Lamar, and Dr. Karen Tatum, for being there for me since I started my career in music and for being there for me throughout the entire doctorate program

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

## Introduction of the Problem

Between 2003 and 2004, the number of awarded PhDs to African Americans went up more than 9%--with the number of Ph.D. degrees increasing from over 1,800 to just over 8,500 between 2004 and 2015 (Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, Kewal Ramani, & Zhou, 2015). Even so, this number is only 12% of the number of Ph.D. degrees awarded to White Americans (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Based on past findings, researchers claimed that some reasons for such a low percentile of African Americans and other minorities furthering their education beyond the bachelor's degree included monetary issues, social issues, such as marriage and children, and not qualifying for the academic rigors of graduate and doctoral education through mandatory entrance exams (McCallum, 2017; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Experts have explained that the prevalence of racism is rampant in academia (Hollingsworth, Patton, Allen, & Johnson, 2018; Keith, Nguyen, Taylor, Mouzon, & Chatters, 2017; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017; Williams, Brown Burnet, Carroll, & Harris, 2018); however, very few researchers examined the perception of microaggression felt by many minorities and other non-White doctoral students from those persons supposedly in place to give support and encouragement, such as administration, faculty, and academic advisors.

Minority and non-White students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have often experienced difficulties in interactions with administrators, faculty, and other university representatives (Burt, Williams, & Palmer, 2018; Williams et al., 2018). Such

difficulties have included racial microaggressions, discrimination, and acts of prejudice against minority/non-White students, which often has created a negative racial climate (Hollingsworth et al., 2018; Keith et al., 2017; Von Robertson, & Chaney, 2017). These same students often perceived discriminatory and racial behaviors from university and college administrators, faculty, academic advisors, and other university representatives who were generally responsible for encouraging students (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Burt et al., 2018; Keith et al., 2017). Ph.D. students are often tasked with coursework coupled with required hours of teaching undergraduate level classes, most commonly Freshman composition—which includes preparing lesson plans, grading large number of papers, and focusing on other personal and individual lifestyles. The stress of such a crowded schedule may prompt these students to reach out for support, encouragement, or, simply, advice. Students are most likely to contact faculty they are close to, but there are occasions in which students will look to administrators or academic advisors as well as other faculty members that they may not know as well. It has often been in such cases that racial microaggressions can occur (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015).

Contemporary society continues to claim that actions of bigotry, racism, and discrimination has been met and countered with racism awareness and diversity training. Even in the collegiate environment, claims of being aware of and focused on acts of racial microaggression have been unable to dispel the numerous accounts of racially biased incidents (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015). These claims, however, are false—as the racist actions of the past have not diminished but have evolved with the politically correct manner of contemporary society. Whereas historical reference to racism and discrimination is countered with suggestions that such behavior is a thing of the past, and that our society has accepted the fact that we are racially diverse, there are records of continued incidents of microaggression

against college students belonging to minority groups (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015). The harm caused by such subtle acts of microaggression have created further perceptions of discrimination and other acts of racial discord, not from peers or fellow Ph.D. candidates but from administration, faculty, and other university representatives (Keith et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018).

**Statement of the Problem**

Students in educational environments in the United States have often found systemic and subtle racial microaggressions disrupting their ability to complete their college degree. Racial microaggression is defined as those everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental insults, prejudiced behaviors, or adverse actions against a person that are communicated through hostility, derogatory, or negative messages targeting persons based on their marginalized membership of a specific group (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Hollingsworth et al., 2018; Perez Huber & Soloranzo, 2015). For example, in the college classroom, a professor may ask a Black student where they are from—relaying the message that they are not American (Messiah College, 2019). Such exposure to this type of microaggression on college and university campuses has impeded learning outcomes and has been found to be problematic with matriculation for many minority/non-White students, mainly due to their having to face systemic impediments that presented unexpected challenges from racial microaggression (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015).

Considering the issue of racial microaggression within this population, it makes sense to apply critical race theory (CRT) to the current study (Johnson & Reynolds, 2018; Williams et al., 2018). Based on CRT, racism was recognized as being ingrained in certain influential persons

within PWIs who are responsible for encouraging African American students towards Ph.D. programs (Harper, Smith, & Davis III, 2018; Lee, 2018; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017).

In the current study, I concentrated on African Americans with doctoral degrees in music who had attended PWIs in order to determine if perceived ideas and experiences of racism affected their academic experiences. The motivations may be based on minorities perceptions of racial microaggression, prejudices, and discrimination from administrative, faculty, or other such university personnel. I further developed the extant work from experts who researched African American college students at PWIs with a focus on the effects of student relationships with faculty, family, and peers based on such interactions being an asset or liability in their present academic endeavors and achievements (Black & Bimper Jr., 2017; Johnson & Reynolds, 2018; Zhou, 2015). I examined perspectives from African Americans with doctoral degrees in music from PWIs and performed the necessary research to better understand the motivations for such students and to determine how these motivations derived from such negative interactions have affected their desire to complete their doctoral programs.

**Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions—regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South—of African Americans with doctoral degrees in music. Using CRT as the conceptual framework, I attempted to discover the issues of racial microaggression perceived by African Americans who earned doctoral degrees in music from PWIs and their interactions with collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors as well as how such perceptions affected their matriculation.

The amount of literature that includes discussions about perceptions of racial microaggressions in regard to this particular group of African Americans is limited. By exploring this topic and gathering information regarding how they actually feel, the current study may have great potential to expand the knowledge base of academia, bringing a higher sense of awareness to racism continuing in academia today (Lilienfeld, 2017; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). A qualitative analysis was conducted to determine themes from the selected sample population based on subjective perceptions. The conceptual framework guiding the current study was CRT, as it explained such reasons for the relationship between African Americans with doctoral degrees in music from PWIs and their perceptions of administrators, faculty, and academic advisors regarding racial microaggression, racial disparity, and discrimination while attending a PWI.

The identified problem of this study has a suggestive significance and addresses the perceptions of African Americans with doctoral degrees in music who have attended PWIs based on their interaction experiences with administrators, faculty, and academic advisors. The significance of the problem is broad, as this study will include observations about how such interactions have created a difficult racial climate for some African American students. Specifically, the members of the population of interest were interviewed and might positively contribute to the knowledge base of racism, discrimination, or other ethnically derogatory behaviors in higher education.

**Research Questions**

The current qualitative, phenomenological study will be guided by semi-structured interviews of African Americans with doctoral degrees in music who have attended a PWI located in a U.S. southern state. The participants volunteered to be a part of this study. The

following research questions guided this qualitative, phenomenological study. The focused examination of such perceptions included the factors of racial microaggression, prejudices, and discrimination from their respective collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions—regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South—of African Americans with doctoral degrees in music. I focused on the following research questions:

1. How do African-American music doctoral candidates at PWIs in the U.S. South describe their lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at these colleges or universities?
2. How do they describe their experiences with the phenomenon of racial microaggression from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors?
3. What are the contexts found within such situations as classes, meetings, and social functions where incidences of racial microaggression occur and that have affected African Americans with doctoral degrees in music?

Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face meetings or telephone calls, lasting 30-60 min. Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions were asked, and the participants' answers were recorded, transcribed, and examined for commonality of answers between all sample-population participants. The purposive sample population consisted of seven minority/non-White (preferably African American) individuals who have recently completed a doctoral program and were awarded their Music doctoral degrees after attending a PWI in a U.S. southern state. The use of inclusion criteria helped me to select participants who have graduated

within the last 5 years so that participants could speak of recent experiences of the racial climate in academic. For data analysis, a modified van Kaam approach was used (Moustakas, 1994).

## Conceptual Framework

For the current study, I utilized CRT as the framework to examine, demystify, and dispel racial inequities and stereotypes that pervade our society (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Williams et al., 2018). The core tenets of CRT include the following theoretical constructs: a) the recognition that racism is commonplace and not an anomaly, b) challenging the dominant idea of White privilege, c) offering a transformative and committed response to social justice, d) analyzing and passing on knowledge of racial subordination continuing in contemporary society to expand awareness, and e) using a transdisciplinary perspective (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). CRT tenets, while challenging the colorblindness, neutrality, and meritocracy found within contemporary society, have guided experts in their research, policy changes, and pedagogy to assist in erasing racial inequalities. Also, there are guiding questions that experts use when applying CRT to their research. The guiding questions included how contemporary scholars use CRT, how this theory has the potential to expand in education, and how it can be used in the future to lessen racism and prejudice in society (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). CRT experts recognize critical legal studies' (CLSs) premise of challenging traditional laws that continue to oppress society and its social structures.

**Researchers stances and experiential base.** In the current study, I focused on my recognition from my own experiences of certain acts of discrimination, microaggression, and racist attitudes towards people of the African-American race. The use of CRT was based on my philosophical assumptions that recognize how racism, prejudice, and discrimination continue to be deeply embedded in contemporary society and have been found throughout college and

university campuses in southern U.S. states. CRT scholars have argued that college students of color have lived experiences that have been silenced by schools and by the pressure to "perform in keeping with the curriculum" often (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Also, African-American students have a unique understanding of race and racism that is important to understand and make part of what is learned in a classroom.

**Conceptual framework.** CRT originated in 1989 as a legal movement implemented by a group of feminists who focused on transforming relationships in society among racism and power (Bell, 1991; Taylor, 2009). Forming a response to the legal movement that challenged liberalism, such as Critical Legal Studies (CLS), this original group explained that people of color are labeled and marginalized. Whereas CLS, as a legal movement, claims that society does not recognize the legal mechanisms that protect minorities from marginalization and racism, CRT critiques those laws that supposedly create equality in society. Derrick Bell (1991), one of the originators of CRT, asserted that racial microaggressions focused on the subtle and subconscious behaviors of people who have underlying issues with ethnicities outside of the White spectrum (Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Bell (1991) suggested that the central assumption of CRT was that racism is not an aberrant phenomenon in society but is, in fact, a common occurrence. Also, experts have suggested that CRT liberates racism within the constructs that the civil rights movement implemented. However, other experts have asserted that CRT provides only a radical critique of society's application of a set of norms rather than aberrant behaviors falling outside of those norms (Bell, 1991; Black & Bimper Jr., 2017).

Some experts assert that CRT benefits are only due to a radical critique of society's application of normative reconstructionism (Bell, 1991; Black & Bimper Jr., 2017). Experts using CRT have found that racism is ingrained into certain influential persons within PWIs who

are responsible for encouraging African American students towards Ph.D. programs (Harper et al., 2018; Lee, 2018; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). The current study will further the extant work from experts who researched African-American music college students at PWIs with a focus on the effects of student relationships with faculty, family, and peers based on such interactions being an asset or liability in their present academic endeavors and achievements (Black & Bimper Jr., 2017; Johnson & Reynolds, 2018; Zhou, 2015). The current study expanded upon past research (Black & Bimper Jr., 2017; Frazier, 2012; Johnson & Reynolds, 2018; Zhou, 2015) to determine how such motivating aspects found from African American student's interactions with administration, faculty, and other university personnel affected a student's desire to complete their doctoral program. The recognition that Black doctoral candidates, particularly those attending PWIs, face added complexity in navigating certain relationships, such as with their advisors, directors, or other administrative or academic mentors, suggests that there is a necessity to observe how the experiences and perceptions of such students affects their success within academia (Black & Bimper Jr., 2017; Hollingsworth et al., 2018; Johnson & Reynolds, 2018; Williams et al., 2018). Whereas society once thought racism had diminished somewhat over the past few decades, several experts have contended that the change in direction was not based on a decline or increase in racist behaviors but has become more indirect and insidious (Lilienfeld, 2017; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Using CRT to understand this navigation and perception of said students presents an implication for intersectionality of racial microaggression, racial stereotyping, and discriminatory practices (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Lilienfeld, 2017).

Vincent Tinto's (2012) model of support will be used in the current study's theoretical construct. Tinto (2012) suggested that a student's perception of negative relationships with

academic advisors and faculty meant that he or she was less likely to feel motivated in completing his or her doctoral program. The CRT expert also believed that, through his prescribed methodology, student success with one's doctoral degree came from the interaction and relationship with an advisor as well as the interactions met with social groups (Tinto, 2012). Tinto (2012) believed that connecting socially into a campus community was part of the independent process of a college students' life and it prompted a stronger commitment to attaining their degree. Tinto's model, as applied to perceived racial microaggression, created an alignment of the institution and collegiate community's social norms (Burt et al., 2018; Tinto, 2012). While this does not mean that African-American students should acclimate to racial microaggression, it does suggest that students are better prepared to handle such encounters and interactions of racism, discrimination, or prejudice (Tinto, 2012).

Acts of aggressive racism on campus are often found within our society, with many experts using the term racial microaggression to exhibit examples of society's behavior of racial prejudices (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Harper et al., 2018). There continues to be a spectacle within our society, often using the term racial microaggression, to exhibit examples of society's behavior of racial prejudices (Harper et al., 2018).

Proponents of CRT postulated that the intersectionality of racism in those who work in a PWI administration was culturally embedded (McClain & Perry, 2017). This, in turn, is challenging to the idea that is dominant within the community and that finds failed attempts at objectivity and color blindness (McClain & Perry, 2017). CRT applied as a framework recognizes that those who are involved in the oppression of African American doctoral students at PWIs must be introduced to social justice and must give the experiential knowledge crucial for change (McClain & Perry, 2017). Proponents of CRT claim that such racist beliefs have been

deeply rooted in the collective learning and facets found within the educational realm of PWIs; changes are fundamental within administrative personnel before equality can be achieved (McClain & Perry, 2017).

For the current study, I examined the perceptions of African Americans regarding racial microaggression with supposed prejudice attitudes from collegiate administrators, faculty, and other supportive persons at PWIs. The use of CRT provided a baseline for the study, serving as the foundation for the contexts, effects, and responses from such perceptions and the affect that these perceived ideas have had on African-American students who attend PWIs. The foundations for CRT are that racial stereotypes perceived from acts of racial microaggression, racial inequities, and prejudicial behaviors are found in interactions of student participants with such administrative persons inclusive of academic advisors, financial aid counselors, faculty, and other student support personnel working for a university or college. Using CRT to observe African-American doctoral candidates who attend PWIs and who perceive their support system of academic advisors, administrators, and other university officials as perpetuating a racist environment, hopefully, will reveal reasons why and how such behaviors continue.

**Definition of Terms**

The phenomenon for the investigation of racist microaggression, prejudice, and discrimination will be based on the premise that it is not known what effect such behaviors towards African American music doctoral students who have attended PWIs have on their respective matriculation. Based on the current study's problem and purpose, the following definitions of key terms are presented:

*Critical race theory (CRT*): A theoretical concept whereby society and culture are examined based on the actions of a prejudice nature. CRT observes two main themes; over the

years, White supremacy, akin to racial power, continues and is maintained in society and the need to transform racial power and the legalities of society against such racial power is necessary (Bell, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

*Discrimination*: The treatment of prejudice based on a person's skin color, religious beliefs, or other cultural factors. In the current study, I focus on racial discrimination, which is the focus of unequal treatment due to a person's race (Clair & Denis, 2015; Koppelman, 2017).

*Ethnicity*: A person's cultural traits shared by other members of a specific society (Koppelman, 2017).

*Matriculation*: The action of enrolling in a specific institutional function. For the current study, matriculation focuses on students being enrolled in college or university courses (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017).

*Predominantly White institutions (PWIs):* Colleges or universities with an identified high (over 50%) population of White students. PWIs are often considered exclusionary to minorities or non-White students (Bourke, 2016).

*Prejudice*: An opinion of one person that is preconceived and based on the notion that another person is different in their looks, beliefs, and other cultural stereotypes which lends to the first person's attitude that they are better and more deserving of all aspects of their relative society (Koppelman, 2017).

*Racism*: Antagonistic behaviors that are directed towards a person from a different race. This can be considered a differentiation of groups of people based on a person's physical characteristics like skin, hair, or eye color (Clair & Denis, 2015; Koppelman, 2017).

*Racist microaggression*: The hostile or abusive treatment of a person based on a person's race (Bourke, 2016).

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Since the current study was both qualitative and phenomenological, there were assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that needed to be addressed.

The assumptions for this study were as follows:

1. The researcher assumed that the participants were honest with their interview responses.
2. The researcher guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and the participant's answers to the interview questions.
3. Use of CRT was assumed for the theoretical foundation of the current study.

The limitations of the study included the following:

1. There may have been bias from the researcher.
2. The research participants may have had difficulty articulating their feelings and thoughts on their experiences, making it difficult for expression. This may have created a language barrier or may have prompted researcher interpretation, making phenomenological reduction necessary.
3. The sample size may have been a limiting factor based on its small size.
4. People that did not use Facebook may not have been able to participate in the study.

The delimitations of the study included the following:

1. The current study was delimited in the use of interviews.
2. The current study was delimited in using a sample population of students only attending PWIs that we located in U.S. southern states.
3. The current study was delimited on its focus of doctoral candidates in music education programs.

## Summary

The disparity found based on racial microaggression at PWIs against African American, and other minority students continue to be evident in contemporary society. The use of CRT allows the researcher to identify the areas in which students are most perceptive regarding prejudice, racial inequity, and racial microaggression based on its premise that racism continues to be embedded in society (Capper, 2015; Hollingsworth et al., 2018; Keith et al., 2017; Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Williams et al., 2018). The examination of racial microaggressions found perceived by African American students attending PWIs will confirm CRT and its thematic foundations of racism still in power and maintained throughout contemporary society, and to change such ideas of racism, discrimination, and prejudices, more revealing information must be found.

This study will focus its research on recognizing African American doctoral candidates in music programs perspectives of what factors are consistent with racial microaggression within their experiences of interactions with college and university administrators, faculty, and academic advisors at southern PWIs. The study hopes to reveal such factors based on the frequency of answers to interview questions from the sample population in hopes that there will show reasons for such negative and prejudiced behaviors from collegiate officials who are meant to encourage and assist all students no matter their race, ethnicity, religion or other cultural facets.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

Experts have suggested that the prevalence of racism is rampant in academia (Hollingsworth et al., 2018; Keith et al., 2017; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017; Williams et al., 2018); however, very few researchers have examined the perception of microaggression felt by many minorities and other non-White graduate students not from their peers but from those in places to give support and encouragement, such as administration, faculty, and academic advisors. Minority and non-White students who have attended PWIs have often experienced difficulties in interactions with administrators, faculty, and other university representatives (Burt et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018). Such difficulties were inclusive of racial microaggressions, discrimination, and acts of prejudice against minority/non-White students, which often created a negative racial climate (Hollingsworth et al., 2018; Keith et al., 2017; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). These same students often perceived discriminatory and racial behaviors from university and college administrators, faculty, academic advisors, and other university representatives who were generally responsible for encouraging students (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Burt et al., 2018; Keith et al., 2017).

Students in educational environments in the United States often found systemic and subtle racial microaggressions disrupting their ability to complete their college degree. Such exposure to racism on college and university campuses impedes learning outcomes and has been found to be problematic for the matriculation of many minority/non-White students, mainly due

to their having to face and function with systemic impediments that presented unexpected challenges from racial microaggression (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). CRT will be used as the conceptual framework for the current study (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Williams et al., 2018). CRT was formed on the basis of a number of fundamental principles, including the recognition that racism is commonplace and not an anomaly, it challenges the dominant idea of White privilege. It also offers a transformative and committed response to social justice, analyzing and passing on knowledge of racial subordination continuing in contemporary society to expand awareness, and using a transdisciplinary perspective (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Informed by these principles of CRT, racism was recognized as being ingrained into certain influential persons within PWIs who are responsible for encouraging African-American students towards Ph.D. programs (Harper et al., 2018; Lee, 2018; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Using CRT as the conceptual framework for the current study, I attempted to discover the issues of racial microaggression perceived by African American music doctoral students based on their interactions with collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors and how such perceptions effect matriculation.

In this chapter, a review of literature will be provided that will help establish the relevance of the identified research problem and justify the purpose of the study. In the literature review, I will cover a number of topics, including CRT, the concept of racial microaggression, PWIs, and racial microaggression in higher education institutions. Through a comprehensive review of these topics, which cover the major concepts that will be a part of this study, I sought to highlight the need for the present study. There are four sections in the literature review. In the first section, I reviewed relevant literature on the conceptual framework of the study. In the

second section, I reviewed the concept of racism and racial microaggression and its relevance in the context of current society. In the third section, I reviewed literature on African Americans at PWIs, especially as it pertains to the element of racism. Finally, I examined the concept of racial microaggression in the context of higher education institutions. This chapter will be concluded with a summary.

## Conceptual Framework

In this study, the researcher will use CRT as the framework to examine, demystify, and dispel racial inequities and stereotypes that pervade our society (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Williams et al., 2018). Researchers use CRT and its concepts to guide pedagogy, policies, and research literature in order to minimize race-based inequality (Crawford, 2018; Sablan, 2018). Also, reflections are found in discussions of CRT itself, which explore the scope and future directions of the theory and its potential for practical implementation such as in the field of higher education (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Researchers working with CRT have appreciated the need to analyze microaggressions as they occur in everyday experiences and that continue societal oppression and marginalization of racial minorities (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). With the current study, the application of CRT will be expanded into the research on microaggression at PWIs, specifically with respect to its impact on African American doctoral students when perpetrated by the people who operate and work at these institutions.

**Principles of CRT.** CRT as a conceptual approach is multidisciplinary and aims to examine power, racism, and race within the context of the United States (Parker, 2015). CRT was a theory developed from critical legal research that originally highlighted the general cultural and social context regarding race and the interaction between law and race within it (Sleeter, 2016). Some of the assertions of CRT include the claim that racism is not abnormal,

those who are in power seek to continue to retain their position are multidimensional, and narratives have significant power (Sleeter, 2016). Additionally, CRT also presents a critique of the doctrine of liberalism (Haskins & Singh, 2015; Patton, 2015; Saloojee & Saloojee, 2018). Specifically, one of the major tenets of CRT is that racism is a normal part of society in the United States and not something abnormal (Sablan, 2018). Racism is common for those who experience it and it affects all aspects of their lives (McGee & Stovall, 2015). In CRT, it is argued that the phenomenon of racism was created through social constructions instead of genetic or biological factors (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015); the latter does not necessitate the existence of racism. And as a social construct, there has been a difference in terms of the meaning associated with an individual's race and the power related to race across societal requirements and time (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). This process is described in CRT as racialization (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). For instance, in the United States individuals identified as White have possessed privilege and power historically above ethnic and racial minorities and still hold such privilege and power to this day (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). An individual's perceived intelligence across different ethnicities and races, the perception of his or her desire to work for those belonging to the White group, and the perception of his or her deviancy may change on the basis of the desire and need of those who are in power (Milner, 2017; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2014). These perceptions were manifested in depictions in the media, labor needs, and legal proceedings (Crawford, 2018). Although racism has undergone significant changes in the United States since the 1960s, its negative influence hasn't disappeared. CRT use helps obtain a view to understand the phenomenon of racism across the different contexts in which it is spread, including through behaviors that show microaggression.

Central to CRT is also the assertion that those groups who are in power benefit from it. In the United States, this refers to those identified as White (Gillborn, 2015). In order to maintain their power, the group in power uses multiple strategies such as the notion of colorblindness (López, Erwin, Binder, & Chavez, 2017). The latter is a concept that asserts that an individual, specifically an individual who is identified as White, does not consider the race or skin color of another individual when forming judgments regarding that individual (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). CRT considers that such individuals who promote the notion of colorblindness consider it to be a strategy that may lead to higher equality and lower prevalence of racism (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). This assertion is then challenged in CRT and doubt is expressed regarding the effectiveness of the notion of colorblindness in reducing racism (Dávila, 2014). Instead, CRT asserts that colorblindness enables racism to be practiced unchecked as it overlooks the experiences that are encountered by those in ethnic and racial minority groups and creates hurdles in addressing racism and developing productive change in society (Dávila, 2014). Some CRT scholars have also asserted that colorblindness as a term should not be used, since it also uses ableist language, that is, language that devalues those with a disability, suggesting that it is a weakness (Capper, 2015); such scholars instead consider the phenomenon to be best described as color evasiveness. Further, since Whites obtain material benefits, such as jobs and wealth, for being a part of the powerful group, they are less likely to desire the elimination of racism in order to secure their current benefits in the future obtained through their association with power (Parker, 2015).

As a result of the fact that those who are in power do not wish to give it away, there are difficulties for those wishing to change society and provide more power to those who are part of the minority (Milner, 2017). Non-Whites, especially African Americans, are able to obtain

equality and power only when their doing so does benefit to Whites (Sleeter, 2016). In CRT, this phenomenon is described as interest convergence (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2014). This can be considered as the altering of racialization for a specific group for the benefit of those in power, namely Whites (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2014). An example of this process was provided by Bell (1991) regarding the verdict that concluded segregation to be unconstitutional. Bell (1991) noted that this was due to the fact that Whites who were in power wanted to be viewed positively and utilized desegregation in order to achieve this goal.

Another important principle within CRT is the recognition that identities are complex; intersectionality is a theory that asserts that an individual does not identify with only one identity, such as their sexual orientation or gender, but instead multiple identifiers together (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The interactions between these various identities determines the position of that individual in society. CRT scholars also assert that race is only one factor that forms an individual's identity, and all factors associated with identity are significant for the experiences of an individual (Capper, 2015; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Together with intersectionality, CRT is also associated with anti-essentialism (Sleeter, 2016). While in essentialism, the goal is to find that which is the common connecting factor between different individuals uniting for a cause, in anti-essentialism, the differences among individuals are acknowledged even though they may have commonality as part of the intersection of their identities (Sleeter, 2016). In general, both anti-essentialism and intersectionality seek to enhance the recognition of the experience of an individual in association with its context (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Sleeter, 2016). In CRT, the same focus takes precedence.

CRT highlights the realization of the significance of narration (Patton, 2015); it is important in CRT that the voices of individuals from ethnic and racial minority groups are

considered. As a result, a fundamental principle that is involved in CRT is the influence of storytelling across different mediums in order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which race is viewed across the nation (Gillborn, 2015). Through such focus, CRT enables those individuals who have been marginalized to tell their stories and allows their stories to be appreciated simultaneously as the narrative of those in power is dismantled and challenged (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016).

As a result of its focus on storytelling, personal narrative or lived experiences help provide an alternate picture from the story that is told through the dominant perspective (Capper, 2015). Such narratives provide understanding regarding the experience of being a non-White individual, which may otherwise be difficult for Whites to grasp (López et al., 2017). The utilization of narratives based on lived experience is considered to be a significant part for the formation of identity for the individual whose story is being told as well as those who are hearing those stories (Sleeter, 2016). It is also suggested that storytelling may help provide an opportunity to express thoughts and experiences to those who have been silenced and have not been able to describe their experiences (Patton, 2015). As a result, storytelling in CRT is viewed as a bridge that enables sharing of experiences. By expressing the experiences of marginalization and discrimination, it is asserted in CRT, an initial step can be taken in the direction towards social change (McGee & Stovall, 2015).

**CRT as a movement.** In addition to being a theory, CRT is also a movement (Sablan, 2018). As a movement, CRT consists of scholars and activists who are interested in exploring and altering the relationship between power, racism, and race (Dávila, 2014). CRT affirms the continued existence of racism and provides a guide to the researchers through a framework for understanding racism through the recognition of underlying patterns (McGee & Stovall, 2015).

CRT emerged as individuals began to question the principles upon which the liberal order was founded, including constitutional law's neutral principles, rationalism since Enlightenment, legal reasoning, and equality theory. The picture presented through CRT is more nuanced (Parker, 2015). Under this nuanced view, microaggression emerges as an example suggesting a subtler type of racist behavior.

Scholars working within CRT noted the misconception among citizens that racism is decreasing, that in contemporary society, more important than race is class (Gillborn, 2015). However, they argue that all social indicators suggest that racism is still an important factor in the lives of non-White individuals including those who are well-educated and in high-quality jobs (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). This view was in alignment with the notion that those who perpetrate microaggression do so without realizing the negative impact of their personal actions (Milner, 2017). Research on CRT has moved from its initial legal environment to show that racism is still a part of the mainstream exploration of race-related conflicts in communication, psychology, sociology, and education (Sablan, 2018). In looking at the educational environment through the lens of CRT, scholars study the various aspects of culture that can affect these processes within education and how it can impact student learning and experience (Crawford, 2018).

CRT researchers working within the context of education note that the official curricula for school as an artifact specific to culture was developed in order to ensure the narrative presented by Whites (Milner, 2017). They highlighted the limited presence of marginalized and non-White individuals (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The result of this narrative was that the stories of Blacks were erased or silenced when such descriptions presented a challenge to the narratives presented by those in power, namely Whites (Sablan, 2018). As a result, what was

erased was not only the stories and histories of Blacks in the United States but also those of other non-Whites who helped build the United States in its current form (Gillborn, 2015). Critical race theory scholars argue for the need to hear their voices (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). By focusing on the lived experiences of African-American students regarding racial microaggression, the present study provides an opportunity for such voices to be heard, thus contributing to the literature enhancing the narratives of those who are marginalized in the dominant narrative.

Researchers within CRT have also noted that CRT can help further the goal of adding the voices of non-Whites (Gillborn, 2015). The notion of presenting the narratives of non-Whites, particularly in the context of education, can help as a strategy to counter the limited storytelling from the side of those who are historically marginalized and whose stories are lacking from the current narratives (Dávila, 2014). Through the lens of CRT, exploring the histories and stories present in community and educational institutions can help obtain an understanding regarding the justification presented by the group in power regarding their power (López et al., 2017). The utilization of powerful racial groups' narratives that developed a sense of privilege on the basis of race, gender, or class was used to provide evidence for the notion that the contemporary privileged hierarchy was justified and normal (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017).

CRT is a framework that has been utilized to review and assess the written histories and consider racial themes and inequalities that have historically spread through the history books of the United States (Saloojee & Saloojee, 2018). At present, the views of many educational institutions' faculty and programs have been formed on the basis of the majoritarian narratives in order to provide explanation for educational inequity (Patton, 2015). Instead of seeking solutions for the problem of inequality, the excuse of barriers of cultural norms of the past was used to

justify the inequalities in enrollment, treatment, and grades of those from minority groups (McGee & Stovall, 2015). Critical race theory, used in the context of education, is focused on the researcher regarding how non-White students experience and react to the educational system of the United States (Milner, 2017). For students from minority groups, it is important that they obtain education in which the individuals and events reflect their identity (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

**CRT and microaggressions.** When applying CRT in the context of microaggression, the relationship between some of the basic themes within CRT and the concept of racial microaggression can be established. Some of these themes include the intersectionality and centrality of racism and race, challenging the ideology of the powerful group, commitment to working towards social justice, the central importance of knowledge based on lived experience, and an interdisciplinary approach (Beaulieu, 2016; Capper, 2015; Haskins & Singh, 2015;).

Researchers have noted that stereotypes have negative consequences on non-White individuals (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). In the present study, a consequence of such stereotypes in terms of racial microaggression was explored in the context of education. Since such stereotypes have been widespread, they may not be limited only to the students' peers. Instead, such stereotypes may affect the administrators, teachers, and others who work at PWIs. CRT helps understand the associations between race, racism, and power (Milner, 2017), and as a result, its use in exploring the consequences of racial microaggression is appropriate.

## Racism and Racial Microaggression

Researchers have viewed racism through two perspectives, the system and the individual (Simatele, 2018; Tao, Owen, & Drinane, 2017). At the level of the individual, racism is manifested through negative behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes with respect to an ethnic or racial

minority group or individual (Simatele, 2018). Negative beliefs and attitudes are considered to be a type of discrimination and categorized within the general category of prejudice (Hotchkins, 2016). At the level of the system, racism is manifested as negative institutional and cultural behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that are based on social power and that ultimately lead to disadvantageous results for racial or ethnic minorities (Tao et al., 2017). For racism to be influential, researchers have suggested three considerations. First, one group must have a belief regarding its superiority (Hunn, Harley, Elliott, & Canfield, 2015). Second, this group that believes in its superiority must have the power to be capable of facilitating a behavior that is racist (Yeo, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Huntt, 2019). Finally, the racism must have an impact on ethnic and racial groups (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). Racial microaggression, which is the focus of the current study, is a form of racism occurring at the individual level that is expressed through subtle insults directed towards non-Whites (Hunn et al., 2015). Microaggressions include daily life beliefs and indignities that are behavioral, environmental, verbal, or nonverbal, unintentional or intentional, and that express derogatory, hostile, and negative racial insults and slights (Casanova, McGuire, & Martin, 2018; Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015).

Racism results in the development of the foundations that lead to inequities that place racial and ethnic minorities in a disadvantageous position (Harris, 2016). When a group is at the center of such a disadvantage, its opposite would be another group who is in a position of advantage (Parsons, 2017). In the United States, non-White individuals are in a position of disadvantage, suggesting that it must be White individuals who are in the position of advantage (Lilly et al., 2018).

**Traditional and modern forms of racism.** Before the era of civil rights, a traditional form of racism was a dominant and acceptable type of racism. Traditional forms of racism were defined as overt discriminatory behaviors and prejudiced views towards non-White individuals (Torino, Rivera, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Wing Sue, 2018). An example of this form of racism includes laws that were placed specifically in order to deprive non-White individuals from the same rights that were natural to White individuals, like the right to vote. The traditional form of racism is no longer considered to be acceptable. Instead, scholars note that after the emergence of the civil rights movement, the traditional form of racism has declined as it no longer acceptable (Torino et al., 2018). It was replaced with a more modern form of racism. The theory of modern racism suggests that people's beliefs regarding race are formed since childhood, specifically through two factors, namely conative and cognitive (Locke & Trolian, 2018). Conative factors in the context of law and public policy are those that can change rapidly, such as the introduction or removal of discriminatory law (Locke & Trolian, 2018). On the contrary, cognitive factors in racism, like negative views towards a specific group of minorities, undergo change at a relatively slower rate compared to formal and institutional measures for equality (Locke & Trolian, 2018). Due to the slower pace with which cognitive changes alter the landscape of society and culture, negative beliefs and effects can continue and pass on to the next generation (Lilly et al., 2018). Certain social and political movements, further, can lead to the reversion of this process when they emerge in reaction to movements for equality and justice (Torino et al., 2018). The modern form of racism is distinguished from the traditional form of racism through the latter's expression being more overt while the former's was more aversive and symbolic (Locke & Trolian, 2018).

While it is different with respect to certain details, the modern form of racism is sometimes used synonymously with aversive racism and symbolic racism (Locke & Trolian, 2018). The theorists who work on current forms of racism highlight certain similarities between these forms, such as the shared belief that the Whites, a group in power, believe in equality for all and are for the majority of time against racism; however, they still possess unconscious and continuous negative attitudes and views with respect to non-Whites (Lino, Hashim, & Ricardo, 2017; Tao et al., 2017). White prejudice against ethnic and racial minorities is not viewed as a group of conscious views but as unconscious views that emerge within an individual in early years through social conditioning (Cothran, 2016). Scholars who work on symbolic racism assert that White individuals view discrimination and prejudice as almost nonexistent and that non-Whites, especially African Americans, are unreasonable with their demands, not working adequately to achieve progress, and deserve what they get (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Keith, 2016; Parsons, 2017). Scholars working on aversive racism argue, as in the theory of modern racism, that people develop racist views as a result of complex cultural and social contexts developed in the early years of childhood (Kanter et al., 2017). Scholars working on aversive racism note also that White individuals confess holding views that are egalitarian and place higher value upon themselves for not having prejudices (Torino et al., 2018). However, as a result of racial socialization, they still hold attitudes and beliefs that are derogatory towards non-Whites unconsciously (Beaulieu, 2016). Additionally, as a result of their individual views regarding equality, Whites are incapable of acknowledging or noting the biases they hold (Wong & Jones, 2018). This failure results in racist expressions that are more subtle than overt racism but discriminatory nonetheless (Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018). The subtle nature of their bias

prevents the perpetrators from recognizing that their treatment of individuals from minority groups is unfair (Ellis, Powell, Demetriou, Huerta-Bapat, & Panter, 2018).

Expressions of modern racism can take multiple forms and it can be difficult to recognize when a behavior or belief expressed is racist. Some expressions of racism can be subtle, which makes it harder to recognize, while others may be hidden behind views that may seem pro-equality, such as the notion of colorblindness discussed previously, but serve as tools for the continuation of racism (Wintner, Almeida, & Hamilton-Mason, 2017). Researchers have examined modern forms of racist expressions in the context of workplaces, such as in decisions to hire or promote individuals, in the context of television and media representations, in the attribution of guilt, in legal proceedings, and finally in the context of microaggression (Harper, 2017; Lui & Quezada, 2019; Simatele, 2018). In the present study, the focus was on microaggression particularly in the context of PWIs.

**Racial microaggression.** Racial microaggression was named and identified first by Pierce et al. (1977) who described racial microaggression as a nonverbal, automatic, stunning, and subtle exchange that is diminutive of Blacks. Following this initial definition, the concept has been expanded and now includes subtle insults, whether visual, nonverbal, or verbal, that are directed towards non-Whites and are often unconscious and automatic (Hunn et al., 2015). Microaggression also includes daily life beliefs and indignities that are behavioral, environmental, and verbal, unintentional or intentional, that express derogatory, hostile, and negative racial insults and slights (Casanova et al., 2018; Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). Based on a review of literature, racial microaggressions can be divided into three overall types, namely microinvalidations, microinsults, and microassaults (Hotchkins, 2016).

***Microassault.*** A microassault is an explicit derogation based on race, the intention of which is to hurt the individual towards whom it is directed; a microassault is similar to traditional forms of racism and can seem like a racial slur (Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2013). A microassault can be manifested environmentally as well as via explicit microinsults (Yeo et al., 2019). A microassault can happen when the assaulter believes to some extent in anonymity while expressing microaggression, when the perpetrator feels safe due to being a part of a group whose members share their views, and when the perpetrator experiences a loss of control (Harris, 2016). Some researchers note that microassaults cannot be considered as micro due to their explicit nature and, therefore, may not be accurately categorized as a microaggression (Harwood, Choi, Orozco, Browne, & Mendenhall, 2015). However, a review of literature on the topic suggests a lack of consensus among researchers regarding the understanding of the term *micro* within microaggression (Hollingsworth et al., 2018). Researchers often distinguish microaggression from macro and argue that it is only in relation to the macro that micro can be discussed (Burch, Batchelor, Burch, Gibson, & Kimball, 2018).

***Microinsult.*** Microinsults are another form of microaggression discussed in the literature. A microinsult is a derogatory or demeaning communication regarding the racial heritage or identity of an individual (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Researchers note that thematically, microinsults are recognized and experienced in relation to intelligence, through perceived low value as a citizen, through pathologizing of an individual's communication method and cultural values, and through assumptions regarding an individual's status with respect to criminality (Rini, 2018; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2014). With respect to intelligence, for instance, a non-White individual may experience a microinsult from someone whose communication suggests that they ascribe lower intelligence to individuals from certain races and higher intelligence to

those of other races (Proctor, Kyle, Fefer, & Lau, 2017). Native- and African-American individuals also experience their cultural values pathologized by Whites, such as through their communication style being considered abnormal. Further, African Americans are often assumed to be perpetrators in criminal activities (Jones, 2017). African Americans are also often seen as having lower value as citizens (Walls & Hall, 2017). Inferiority assumed in communication is another form of microinsult that is often directed towards African Americans, along with Hispanic and Latino citizens (Proctor, Kyle, Lau, Fefer, & Fischetti, 2016).

***Microinvalidations.*** Microinvalidations represent another aspect of microaggression. Microinvalidations refer to forms of communication that dismiss the feelings or experience of non-White individuals (Brezinski, Laux, Roseman, O'Hara, & Gore, 2018). Researchers have identified microinvalidations through its similarity of themes in the experience of non-White individuals, such as the myth of meritocracy, denial of a person of their role in the spread of racism and the presence of their own racism, getting told that an individual's experience of the world occurs through colorblindness, and treatment of non-Whites as outsiders in their own land (Torino et al., 2018; Harris, 2016; Simatele, 2018). Examples of being treated as outsiders include the consistently reported occurrence of Asian Americans who are asked about their country of origin; reports suggest microinvalidation to be the most frequent form of racial microaggression experienced by individuals in that community. Among African Americans, an example of microinvalidation would be the lack of promotion in alignment with achievements in the workplace while being told about meritocracy.

**Impact of microaggressions.** After the research on racial microaggression began to be developed, multiple forms of microaggressions have been explored and identified along with themes about racial microaggressions (Ellis et al., 2018). Among Asian Americans, researchers

have suggested that Asian Americans experience the forms of microaggressions that are generally experienced by non-Whites, such as cultural values being pathologized, judgements about intelligence, and treatment as lower-class citizen. In addition, Asian Americans also experience microaggressions that are more specific and have received limited attention from scholars, which include microinvalidations such as lack of acknowledged differences between different Asian ethnicities, women's sexualization, men's emasculation, mistaken identity and exclusion from the ethnic community (Hunn et al., 2015; Lilly et al., 2018; Simatele, 2018). Additionally, the level of education attained by an African American has also been found to have an influence on their experience of microaggression (Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018). For instance, those who do not possess college degrees may be treated as outsiders in their own land (Wintner et al., 2017). Individuals who are multiracial experience microaggressions that are similar to those identified for others, except in their case there is an important difference regarding the commonality of microaggressions experienced by certain types of multiracial individuals compared to others (Cothran, 2016).

Researchers have also noted the increase in the use of and the need for a more expansive conceptualization of microaggressions in order to accommodate the exploration of microaggressions outside of ethnicity and race; such a conceptualization should be completed by exploring experiences that are subtly discriminatory to other groups that are marginalized based on factors other than solely ethnicity and race, such as the LGBT community, gender, gender and race based intersectionality, and sexual orientation and race, mental illness, educational attainment, and body-type (Torino et al., 2018). Although it is important to attain equality, in alignment with the conceptual framework of the present study, further literature on

microaggressions in the context of these groups will not be reviewed, and the focus will remain on microaggressions based on race and ethnicity specifically.

Microaggressions, as previously noted, can be expressed through both nonverbal and verbal behaviors (Simatele, 2018). Microassaults, which are conscious behaviors that are aggressive towards a group of individuals from a different culture, can be both nonverbal and verbal (Simatele, 2018). Nonverbal microaggressions include intentionally discriminating against individuals from non-White backgrounds, avoidance based on their ethnicity or race, and name calling that is racial and culturally derogatory (Hollingsworth et al., 2018). Verbal microaggressions consist of innuendos, comments, and snubs that are motivated by racial factors (Wintner et al., 2017). Examples of microinsults, which refer to unconscious insults towards non-Whites, include comments that indirectly suggest the inferiority of the individual compared to White individuals (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). Finally, an example of a verbal microinvalidation, which refers to comments made in order to elicit a response in a non-White individual on being invalid, include complementing an American citizen for his or her fluent English on the basis of their appearances alone (Locke & Trolian, 2018). Such a comment leads to the invalidation of the non-White individual's legitimacy as the country's citizen (Lui & Quezada, 2019). Instead of trying to understand them and their experiences, the White individual in such a case invalidates the non-White person's identity by suggesting that the non-White person is an outsider (Ellis et al., 2018). Similar to microinsults, microinvalidation are often unconscious (Wong & Jones, 2018).

Multiple researchers have studied microaggression in various contexts (Kanter et al., 2017). For instance, in the context of social science, researchers have developed examples of behavior that is considered microaggression and compared them to the effect they have on the

victim of the behavior (Yeo et al., 2019). An example of such microaggression would include a White individual talking about humans as the only race in existence, which, although against racism on the surface, reveals a lack of understanding when spoken by a member belonging to the group that holds the most power and directed against a member of a marginalized group, suggests a lack of sensitivity to their experiences and a denial of their personal cultural identity (Wintner et al., 2017). Researchers in the field of social science note the importance of training regarding cultural communication in professional environments (Rini, 2018).

A characteristic of microaggression that has been noted in the literature is that microaggressions occur not only between Whites and non-Whites, but also among non-Whites, especially for biracial children (Harwood et al., 2015). Children of multiracial identity, for instance, experience microaggression from members of their own family (Torres-Harding & Turner, 2014). Some findings from the literature on this theme include the isolation experienced by the victim in the environment of his or her own family, the experience of favoritism from the members of his or her own family, the victim questioning his or her own racial identity and authenticity, the denial of his or her experiences and identity as a multiracial individual by members of the family who are not multiracial, and emotions regarding family history and heritage (Lui & Quezada, 2019; Yeo et al., 2019).

Microaggressions among biracial children can have a negative impact on the psychological health and self-esteem of an individual (Tao et al., 2017). Further, the notion that microaggressions can occur within an individual's own house, which is ideally a safe space, suggests the severity of the phenomenon (Harwood et al., 2015). Research findings suggest that microaggressions experienced during childhood from one's own family can also have an impact on an individual during adulthood (Proctor et al., 2016; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2014). For

instance, children who feel less favored by their parents or family members can experience negative consequences on their mental health; it can cause psychological harm, which often occurs in children who face parental favoritism of their siblings (Walls & Hall, 2017). Experiences of this nature are not uncommon among children of biracial identity; researchers suggest that in such cases, it is important for parents to have open and honest conversations regarding racial problems with their children and to provide the children with the capacity to solve the problem both externally and internally (Torino et al., 2018; Lilly et al., 2018).

**Future research.** In the general context, researchers have noted the negative impact of microaggressions, such as the fact that they are associated with difficulties among ethnic and racial minority students in obtaining education in traditional settings (Hollingsworth et al., 2018). Based on the conceptual framework of CRT, it can be noted that non-White students encounter microaggressions in different parts of their daily life, and, in the educational environment, microaggression can be perpetrated by professors in the classroom as well as students (Lino et al., 2017). In this regard, some of the themes in the literature on microaggression in the educational context include institutional microaggression, interpersonal forms of microaggressions, and jokes about one's race as a form of microaggression (Cothran, 2016; Ellis et al., 2018; Keith, 2016; Lui & Quezada, 2019). With respect to how students respond to microaggression in the educational environment, some of the themes found in the literature include the experiences ranging from a sense of rejection to the desire to build community to successfully navigate through different worlds at once (Harwood et al., 2015). However, the difficulties non-White students experience with respect to microaggression still have a negative impact on their aspirations for higher education (Keith, 2016).

It is necessary, therefore, to further explore microaggression in the context of education for non-White students (Ellis et al., 2018). Microaggression requires sufficient response from non-White victims because it is constrained not only to the educational environment (Torino et al., 2018). In the context of business, for instance, microaggression is manifested in the form of inequities such as not obtaining adequate respect from others, experiencing devaluation because of ethnicity or race, and being overlooked. In order for non-White individuals to be able to adequately respond to such actions that might have significant impact on their career prospects and overall life experience, it is important to examine how microaggression is experienced and dealt with by non-White students before they begin their professional careers (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Thus, the focus of this study on doctoral students presents an example of microaggression experienced in the context of an institution before the beginning of an individual's professional life. Focusing on the experiences of African-American students with respect to their encounters with microaggressions from those who work at their educational institutions can help obtain an understanding of their lived experiences as well as coping mechanisms.

**African Americans at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)**

Researchers have noted that the higher education system in the United States is one of the world's most diverse; the range of its higher educational institutions in terms of traditions, sources of funding, structures of governance, sizes, and types enable access to post-secondary education of various forms possible for a wide variety of individuals (Domingue, 2015). Yet, the higher education system in the United States, notwithstanding its diversity, is also characterized by a legacy of exclusion (Walls & Hall, 2017). While some universities and colleges in the United States have a record of enrolling and graduating non-White students, even since their

inception, many other higher education institutions have a record of excluding ethnic and racial groups from involvement (Parsons, 2017).

**Historical overview.** Viewed in relation to its history, the exclusion of Blacks in higher education institutions in the United States was facilitated on legal grounds, which barred Blacks from education in the southern United States until the second half of the nineteenth century (Gasman, Nguyen & Conrad, 2015). After that period, the exclusion of Blacks in higher education institutions was facilitated by both legal and informal racial segregation (Gasman et al., 2015). The legal segregation was through discrimination and separation on racial grounds as legally mandated (Gasman et al., 2015). Informal racial segregation was segregation facilitated through customs instead of law (Gasman et al., 2015). African Americans did not have the legal permit to enroll in segregated institutions for Whites until the civil rights era in the 1960s (Gasman et al., 2015). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited universities and colleges from participating in race-based discrimination against any student (Gasman et al., 2015). An important consequence of Black exclusion from mainstream higher education systems was the creation of systems for postsecondary institutions of education that were reserved mainly for Whites along with separate institutions that were mainly established for Blacks (Gasman et al., 2015). In this context, PWIs emerged as those institutions for higher education that had a record of excluding African Americans and had a historical composition consisting predominantly of Whites (Gasman et al., 2015).

In contrast to PWIs are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Gasman et al., 2015). These institutions were developed externally to the mainstream higher education systems (Gasman et al., 2015). They were developed for the main goal of providing education to African Americans, even though they were not officially exclusionary in general (Gasman et al.,

2015). HBCUs can be defined as all universities and colleges that have been historically Black before the Civil Rights era and whose foundational goal was to provide education to African Americans (Gasman et al., 2015). HBCUs evolved first through missionary-supported private schools that began to develop rapidly (Gasman et al., 2015). Schools that developed during this period, which began near the completion of the Civil War, provided mandatory education for African Americans and later went on to provide a curriculum for college that was similar to the education provided at White higher education institutions (Gasman et al., 2015). In its next iteration, HBCUs evolved through public grants of land that began to develop rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century (Gasman et al., 2015).

Since the Civil Rights era in the 1960s, the attendance of African-American students in PWIs for postsecondary education has significantly increased (Gasman et al., 2015). Researchers estimated that about three quarters of all African-American students in college are enrolled in PWIs. While it is now possible for Black students to enroll in a wide variety of institutions for higher education, the experiences of these students are still unequal (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Researchers have suggested that the composition of college campuses in terms of race still has a significant impact on a broad range of outcomes for African-American students, including aspirations for occupation, involvement in social activities, and educational attainment (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015; Karkouti, 2016; Toliver, Moore, & Redcross, 2015). Black students who are enrolled in PWIs are found to not perform well compared to their White peers across a wide range of outcomes, including psychological adjustment, persistence, and educational achievement (Harper, 2015).

**HBCUs versus PWIs.** African-American students in general are more likely to adjust better in HBCUs compared to their African-American peers in PWIs (Leath & Chavous, 2017).

Multiple researchers have found evidence for the significant contributions made for the education of Black students by HBCUs due to the powerful educational atmosphere facilitated at these institutions (Gasman et al., 2015; Louis et al., 2016). Researchers suggest that the systems developed at HBCUs provide benefits to Blacks students in college as they represent and develop African-American culture. Particularly, the cultural atmosphere involving context and content of cultural identity that is present at HBCUs positively influences Blacks students. Such institutions are tools for the transmission and development of Black cultural resources and knowledge through behaviors, attitudes, and networks (Gasman et al., 2015).

The success experienced by non-White students, especially African Americans, in enrolling at PWIs since 1980s is not significant when viewed against the success experienced by African-American students in HBCUs and White students in PWIs (Gasman et al., 2015). For non-White students who are not African American, the outcomes associated with PWIs are not completely positive, since in these institutions they have a higher likelihood of dropping out, obtaining lower average grades, and lower matriculation rates in graduate school when compared to Black students in HBCUs and White students in PWIs (Gasman et al., 2015; Robertson & Chaney, 2015).

Researchers have found that African-American students enrolled in PWIs are more likely to experience racism in the campus atmosphere than their African-American peers enrolled in HBCUs. Further, the perceptions of African-American students are often associated with emotions such as dissatisfaction, stress, and social isolation. Researchers have highlighted the importance of informal aspects within the intuitional structures in enabling student outcome-related predictions (Gasman et al., 2015). At PWIs, African-American students highlight

emotions such as integration issues, discrimination based on race, perceived hostility, and alienation.

Further, there are multiple differences between Black students who attend PWIs and Black students who are enrolled in HBCUs based on gender. African-American female and male students who are enrolled in PWIs feel lower engagement in the atmosphere at campus, had higher grades in high school, and have high family incomes (Eakins & Eakins, 2017). African-American students at PWIs are also more likely to be dependent on their families for financial support and problem solving (Oliver, Datta, & Baldwin, 2017). However, there are differences between the experiences of male African-American students enrolled in HBCUs and PWIs. Although findings highlight the significance of self-confidence as influential for male African-American students at both HBCUs and PWIs, self-confidence has been associated with educational achievement more when compared to HBCUs (Alexander & Hermann, 2016).

Similarly, for female students, background aspects are more significant at PWIs, specifically the occupational and educational background of mothers (Hollingsworth et al., 2018). Self-awareness regarding one's race has also been found to be a significant factor for African-American female students at PWIs, although no such correlation has been found in HBCUs. Researchers have suggested that female students who have less awareness regarding racial issues at PWIs are less likely to attain positive educational outcomes (Gómez, 2015; Tichavakunda, 2016).

**Action plans at PWIs for minority students.** PWIs have remained committed to promoting programs for decreasing racial isolation and inequities at university and college campuses; action plans meant to increase diversity have become the primary method for higher educational institutions in the United States to express their commitment to equity in outcome

and inclusion for individuals across all races in the colleges and universities and to promote tools for solving the problems in a diverse environment (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). In this regard, CRT has been utilized to explore the conversations around race and diversity, develop policies for education, and think about and develop the narratives specific for non-White students in the university and college campuses.

Critical race theory, which emerged from legal and feminist contexts, has been used to alter the relationship between power, racism, and race in the United States as a response to scholarship that has challenged the accepted liberal doctrines (Sablan, 2018). CRT has been used to examine the main themes that have influenced the representations and narratives of Black students, such as democracy, marketplace, disadvantage, and access (McGee & Stovall, 2015). The resulting conversations represent Black students as agents for change, commodities, victims at risk, and outsiders (McGee & Stovall, 2015). The themes identified as influencing the narratives of Black students have put Blacks in the same framework as culturally foreign individuals for the institutions, thus highlighting the necessity for PWIs to enact and implement diversity policies (Domingue, 2015). CRT has been used to highlight the fact that the views and prejudices towards African-American students are self-reinforcing and unfair, leading to the need for additional protection for these students that can be provided through diversity policies (McGee & Stovall, 2015).

PWIs have begun to develop policies that assist students from marginalized groups to enroll in colleges and graduate (Robertson & Dundes, 2017). However, Black students still experience problems in obtaining their goals at PWIs (Walls & Hall, 2017). Through the efforts across multiple years for equal education, Black students have become capable of studying in the same spaces as White students only to experience racially uncomfortable conditions (Parsons,

2017). In response, PWIs have adopted and begun to focus on developing programs that help non-White students graduate; PWIs began these efforts through the development of policies that helped Black students adapt and adjust to new environments (Ellis et al., 2018).

The focus on the development of diversity policies was not limited to Black students. Instead, it includes Black students as one of the many groups that could obtain protection through such policies (Zambrana et al., 2016). In this regard, researchers have developed theoretical frameworks to explain the part of teachers in championing diversity; these frameworks suggested that teachers could be effective if they understood the important part of culture in the learning and teaching process, combining schooling, culture, and cognition within one context (Gasman et al., 2015). In this framework, teachers were encouraged to be more culturally competent in order to obtain a better view of the learning process of Black students (Gasman et al., 2015); diversity can be promoted through teachers, it is argued, when the teachers are able to understand the distinctions in the learning processes of White and Black students.

The goal of diversity policies is to promote not only racial equality but educational outcomes for non-White students, which rely on factors that are different for non-White students compared to White students (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Educational success at PWIs for Black students relies on multiple factors including their peers, friends and family from the home environment, relationships with teachers, and educational attainment in high school (Eakins & Eakins, 2017; Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015). Researchers have suggested that a strong correlation exists between a relationship with teachers and student educational attainment in college (Walls & Hall, 2017). Relationships with teachers have been found to be positively related to retention, educational attainment, and college satisfaction (Zambrana et al., 2016).

Support from family can have a significant impact on Black students' outcomes (Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Research regarding Black high achievers at PWIs has indicated that financial, academic, and emotional support from families had a significant positive influence on these students (Tichavakunda, 2016). The absence of such support among Black students at PWIs was found to be associated with low achievers, as it had a negative impact on their graduation outcomes (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015). Another important factor in the educational attainment of Black students is disproportionately high penalties, which, at the high school level, can have a negative impact on Black students' desire for higher education (Hollingsworth et al., 2018). For instance, suspension from school for Black students is not accompanied with services external to school (Gasman et al., 2015); as a result, Black students perceive this as an indication of the belief that they are not meant for academic environments, which discourages them from entertaining the possibility of attaining higher education.

Researchers have asserted that after Blacks students have secured high educational attainment at PWIs, their retention and graduation rates will increase across PWIs in general (Oliver et al., 2017). In this regard, researchers have highlighted the need for Black students to obtain memberships in various cultures and subcultures within the campus at PWIs; lack of success in this area may lead to lower rates of graduation for Blacks at PWIs (Domingue, 2015). An important tool for ensuring Black students adjust well to the environment and attain educational success at PWIs is academic advisors (Parsons, 2017). Researchers have suggested that those academic advisors who assist Black students by humanizing their work, adopting an approach at work that is multidimensional, and who are proactive with their work with respect to non-Whites play a significant role in the success of non-White students (Gómez, 2015; Robertson & Chaney, 2015).

Researchers have used models for retention of Black students and have associated specific current behaviors with previous behaviors, intention, attitudes, and normative values (Alexander & Hermann, 2016). Using such models, they have found that Blacks students at PWIs, in order to obtain comfort, move towards particular situations and individuals, which results in their isolation and help seeking from advisors and teachers who are White (Parsons, 2017). Through diversity policies that help the staff at PWIs obtain a better understanding of Black students, PWIs can develop organizations at campus that are centered towards the needs of Black students and bridge the gap between them and the majority of White students (Oliver et al., 2017). The development of cultural adjustment can help Black students experience comfort and belonging, which can enhance their retention rates at PWIs (Domingue, 2015).

As the need to increase graduation and retention rates of Black students at PWIs continues to be felt more, grant money has been channeled towards PWIs in order to enhance retention and graduation rates (Hollingsworth et al., 2018). Institutions that focus on non-White students have received grant money to improve their processes of documentation and analysis for increasing the rate of success for African American students (Tichavakunda, 2016); as a result, there have been improvements and innovations at PWIs to increase the rate of completion for non-White students. Some of these improvements and innovations include approaches assisted by computers for remedial academic programs, enabling progress of students at the pace they are comfortable with, enrolling more full-time instructors for Mathematics, replacement of grades in letter for fail/pass systems of skills mastery, increase of credits provided for remedial programs, and student progress tracking that is much more efficient (Gasman et al., 2015). It is the responsibility of all educational institutions to enhance retention and academic outcomes for non-White students (Alexander & Hermann, 2016). Since the population of these students has come

to represent a large part of the overall student population at colleges and universities, it is important for them to develop new strategies to facilitate student success (Ellis et al., 2018). While progress has been made at PWIs to eliminate overt racism and help non-White students achieve academic success through diversity programs and other policies, non-White students continue to face challenges that are unique to them and that their White peers do not experience (Walls & Hall, 2017). These challenges have a negative impact on the overall educational experience of non-White students at PWIs (Gómez, 2015). Further, the lack of adjustment and comfort among Black students at PWIs as a result of such inconveniences is a major factor in their relative underperformance compared to Black students at HBCUs. One source of such inconveniences are microaggressions.

## Racial Microaggression in Educational Institutions

Researchers have studied microaggression in the realm of educational institutions; these studies have been conducted in specific contexts, such as among faculty, counselling processes, and college campuses (Locke & Trolian, 2018). Racial microaggression has been examined with respect to education in terms of its meaning and implications (Locke & Trolian, 2018). Researchers have also examined the problem of microaggression by exploring the differences in perspectives among White and non-White counselors (Locke & Trolian, 2018). Based on the review of literature, it can be noted that microaggression appears in the context of educational institutions in the same manner in which it appears in general context, that is, in the three forms previously outlined, namely microinvalidation, microinsult, and microassault (Locke & Trolian, 2018).

**Examples of microaggression at educational institutions.** In the context of educational institutions, specific examples of microassaults, which are intentional and conscious actions of

discrimination defined by nonverbal or verbal attacks with the purpose of hurting individuals, include the use of White supremacist language and signs like swastikas, displaying racial epithets, or not allowing one's child to date individuals of certain ethnicities and races (Beaulieu, 2016; Kanter et al., 2017). Microassaults are environmental, nonverbal, and verbal communications defined by insensitivity and rudeness that insult a person's racial identity and heritage; in the context of educational institutions, they include asking individuals about how they managed to be enrolled, implying that only affirmative action made it possible for the victim to enroll in a specific institution (Ellis et al., 2018). Finally, in the context of educational institutions, microinvalidations, which are communications defined by subtle nullification, negation, or exclusion of experience, thoughts, and emotions of non-White individuals, include White students asking Asian students about the place of their birth, suggesting that the victims are outsiders in their own land (Wintner et al., 2017).

The focus on personal narratives in the exploration of the experiences of non-White individuals has been a defining characteristic in the existing literature with respect to different forms of racism (Hotchkins, 2016). Such narratives have assisted researchers in understanding details and categorizing different forms of racial microaggressions in the context of educational institutions (Wintner et al., 2017). These categories, some of which were discussed previously, include environmental microaggressions, perceived low value as a citizen, pathologizing of an individual's communication method and cultural values, meritocracy myths, assumptions regarding an individual's status with respect to criminality, colorblindness claims, assumptions regarding intelligence, and treatment as an outsider in one's own land (Brezinski, et al., 2018; Harris, 2016; Yeo, et al., 2019).

**Similarities and differences between racial groups.** Multiple researchers have examined the phenomenon of microaggressions among African-American students, indigenous individuals, Asian Americans, and other non-White students (Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018). Researchers have suggested that those who experience microaggressions in their daily life, irrespective of the kind of microaggressions they encounter, experience negative and pervasive consequences of microaggressions on their mental health (Yeo et al., 2019). Race-based experiences that are negative can prove to be significant barriers for students from ethnic and racial minority groups in their path to academic success (Wintner et al., 2017). Emotional and social experiences, such as emotions of distress and belonging, and educational attainment have been found to be correlated among ethnic and racial minority students (Harris, 2016). For the racial and ethnic minority students, there is a higher degree of potential for distress, higher likelihood of race-based experiences that are negative, and a lower perceived sense of belonging (Tao et al., 2017).

Researchers also suggest that, in general, higher education non-White students are more likely to experience microaggressions associated with assumptions of similarity, exoticization, inferiority, faculty microaggressions, and microinvalidations (Burch et al., 2018; Kanter et al., 2017). Although assumed criminality and treatment as low-class citizens are also experienced by non-White students, their persistence is not uniform and can differ from one group to another (Jones, 2017). With respect to African-American students, there is a more frequent and higher possibility of microaggression (Torres-Harding & Turner, 2014); after African Americans, Asian American students are more likely to experience microaggressions, followed by Hispanic students. In general, findings from multiple studies suggest the common theme that African-American students are more likely than any other group of students to experience

microaggressions (Keith, 2016). Those students who have darker skin color among African-American students are likely to experience more discrimination (Lui & Quezada, 2019). Such findings are in alignment with the belief that students from racial and ethnic minority groups in general experience more microaggressions compared to students from racial and ethnic majority groups (Walls & Hall, 2017).

**Student coping strategies.** As researchers have suggested a higher occurrence of microaggressions encountered by African Americans, African-American students are also found to use higher amounts of coping strategies (Hunn et al., 2015). Thus, although African Americans experience frequent attacks of microaggressions, their coping strategies are generally positive, such as seeking instrumental or emotional support from religion and loved ones (Proctor et al., 2017). One of the causes for this could be the impact of friends, family, and parents teaching African-American students, either directly or indirectly, about the ways they can cope with negative racial experiences in general from childhood (Rini, 2018). Also, ethnic and racial identity could be an important source of the use of coping strategies among African-American students (Walls & Hall, 2017).

Generally, doctoral students' utilization of coping behaviors tends to be higher than undergraduates (Wintner et al., 2017). However, repeated negative experiences as a result of microaggressions might have an adverse impact on the well-being and mental health of African-American students (Beaulieu, 2016). Such an experience can encourage them to drop out, which may have lifelong consequences on their career prospects and life experience (Lilly et al., 2018). Researchers provided support that students from ethnic and racial minority groups with an experience of microaggression described a sense of lower belonging and higher emotional distress in their educational program (Lui & Quezada, 2019). Also, negative experiences related

to race were related to a lower perceived sense of belonging, contributing to a negative overall experience at higher education institutions compared to students from ethnic and racial majority groups (Torres-Harding & Turner, 2014).

Researchers have suggested that there are differences between African-American students' experience of microaggression and the microaggressions experienced by Asian-American students. For instance, among Asian American students, the major form of microaggression was the assumption of being similar to other ethnic groups and exoticization (Kanter et al., 2017). Other forms of microaggressions experienced by Asian Americans included being treated differently or ignored by colleagues due to their ethnicity and race and being assumed as inferior in terms of their qualifications and positions (Torino et al., 2018). There are significant differences between the microaggressions experienced by African Americans and Asian Americans with respect to being assumed to be similar to other ethnicities and exoticization; these two forms of microaggressions are more likely to occur among Asian Americans compared to African Americans (Parsons, 2017). Further, Asian Americans are more likely to feel like perpetual foreigners compared to African Americans; however, in all other forms of microaggressions, African Americans have a higher likelihood of being victims compared to all other ethnicities and races (Harwood et al., 2015).

**Summary**

In this chapter, I provided a review of literature exploring the existing literature on the topics relevant to the identified research problem to highlight the need for the present study. In the first section on the conceptual framework, the significance of CRT in the context of racism and racial microaggression was established, and justification was provided for its use to form the conceptual framework of the study. In the second section, research on racism and racial

microaggressions was explored. It was noted that racial microaggressions can be divided into three overall types, namely microinvalidations, microinsults, and microassaults. In the third section, literature on African Americans at PWIs was discussed. The history of PWIs and HBCUs since near the end of the Civil War until the Civil Rights era as well as a review of literature on the current status of African Americans in PWIs in terms of their overall educational experience suggested the need for ensuring diversity strategies at PWIs for non-White, especially African-American students. In the fourth section, a review of literature on the concept of racial microaggression in the context of higher education institutions was provided, and the need for focusing on the lived experiences of African-American higher education students with respect to microaggressions was established to both expand and inform the existing literature and assist with enacting and reforming existing policies meant to improve the educational outcomes of African-American students at PWIs. In the next chapter, details regarding the methodology of the research study will be discussed.

**Research gap.** In general, researchers in the field of microaggression have suggested that there is  a lack of research in which the experiences of African-American students are explored in the context of doctoral education in PWIs from sources such as those who work at the PWI; consequently, it is not known how such students experience and cope with racial microaggression from those who work at the PWIs themselves (Yeo et al., 2019). This is especially relevant for African-American students, who are disproportionately more likely to experience most forms of microaggressions. Additionally, since PWIs are seeking to encourage the enrollment of diverse students and ensure their well-being and academic success, it is important for them to recognize the aspects of the Black experience that are lacking in the

literature, which may result in programs enacted to curb microaggressions and promote success for African American students not achieving their intended effects (Burch et al., 2018).

Researchers studying microaggressions in the context of educational institutions have noted the need for more research, especially in the context of PWIs, in order to increase current understanding (Beaulieu, 2016). Further, there is a need for research in which the perceptions and lived experiences of students are at the center of the conversation around microaggression (Wong & Jones, 2018). Such an account can help eliminate some of the difficulties that stem from lack of understanding regarding the significance and impact of racial microaggression due to a limited focus on the lived experiences of the students themselves, especially in the context of doctoral programs at PWIs (Brezinski et al., 2018).

As the United States becomes more diverse, institutions of higher education are also undergoing changes and becoming more diverse. Therefore, it is important to retain and enroll doctoral students who are non-White across all fields of education to provide better service to the changing population (Torino et al., 2018). Exploring the phenomenon of microaggressions through the lived experiences of African-American doctoral students at PWIs will help inform the existing literature as well as current policies on the particular areas related to the problem that requires special attention, the specific problems, the origins and possible causes of the problems, the ways in which students cope with the problems, and what areas can be targeted to help students cope successfully and obtain better outcomes. This study, which explored African American music doctoral candidates' lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South, will help obtain this stated outcome and contribute to the existing body of research as well as practical policies

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

In the current study, I concentrated on doctoral candidates who attended doctoral music programs at PWIs with the purpose of exploring their lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South. The experiences may be based on students' perceptions of racial microaggression, prejudices, and discrimination from administrative, faculty, or other such university personnel. Using CRT as the conceptual framework, I attempted to understand occurrences of racial microaggression perceived by African-American music doctoral students based on their interactions with collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors and how such perceptions affected their matriculation.

## Research Questions

This study was guided by semi-structured interviews of African-American music doctoral candidates who attended PWIs located in the U.S. South. The following research questions were used:

RQ 1. How do African American music doctoral candidates at PWIs in the U.S. South describe their lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at these colleges or universities?

RQ 2. How do African-American music doctoral students in the U.S. south describe their experiences with the phenomenon of racial microaggression from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors?

RQ 3. What are the contexts found within such situations of racial microaggression that have affected African-American music students?

For the current study, the theoretical framework of CRT was used to develop the research questions. The core tenets of CRT include the theoretical constructs of a) the recognition that racism is commonplace and not an anomaly, b) challenging the dominant idea of White privilege, c) offering a transformative and committed response to social justice, d) analyzing and passing on knowledge of racial subordination continuing in contemporary society to expand awareness, and e) using a transdisciplinary perspective (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). CRT provided a baseline for this study, explaining the contexts, effects, and responses from the perceptions and the effect perceived ideas have on African-American students who attend PWIs. Specifically, three factors from CRT were used to develop the research questions: racist treatment, racial microaggression, and a transdisciplinary view on the context within which racial microaggression takes place. These three factors correspond to the three respective research questions. Thus, the first and second research questions were on understanding the lived experiences of African-American music doctoral students who have attended PWIs with respect to racist treatment and racial microaggression from those who work at their colleges or universities, including collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors. Further, the third research question was on exploring the contexts across the situations of microaggression in the experiences of the participants.

## Site and Population

**Population description.** The general population of interest consisted of minority/non-White (preferably African American) doctoral students who had attended PWIs located in the U.S. South. A PWI is a college or university with an identified high (over 50%) population of White students (Bourke, 2016). There are 4,500 higher education institutions that are nationally accredited, based on the listing in Higher Education Directory (2018). Of these, 2,781 institutions are regionally accredited (Higher Education Directory, 2018). PWIs represent 77% of these higher education institutions in the United States, with Minority Serving Institutions forming the remaining 23% (Higher Education Directory, 2018). Among these PWIs, 10% have a doctoral degree as the highest granted degree (Higher Education Directory, 2018).

The target population consisted of minority/non-White (preferably African American) music doctoral candidates who attended PWIs located in the U.S. South. The sample for this study consisted of seven minority/non-White (preferably African American) individuals who had attended a doctoral program in music at the selected PWIs.

A qualitative research study, such as the current study, has a small sample size due to the focus on the in-depth experiences of the participants (Vagle, 2018). I recruited men and women to ensure sufficient diversity of gender for this study. The final sample was selected through purposeful sampling and included seven minority/non-White (preferably African American) individuals who had attended a doctoral program in music from four different states (Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana) and six different PWIs. Purposeful sampling was determined to be appropriate for this study because the purposeful sampling strategy, which is used often within qualitative research with a similar focus as the current study on individual subjective experiences, helps the selection and identification of individuals who best embody the

information needed to explore the identified research phenomenon (Flick, 2018). Thus, participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria for the study, which represented the characteristics needed to explore the research phenomenon. The inclusion criteria for the participants were as follows:

1. Self-identified as African American.
2. Must have graduated from a doctoral program at a PWI in the U.S. South.
3. Had to have graduated college between 2013 and 2018.

**Site description.** The study was conducted with students who had attended PWIs in the U.S. South. I recruited participants from Facebook through the group Minority Band Directors National Association (MBDNA). Since the participants' details remained anonymous and they were recruited directly, it was not necessary to obtain permission from the university attended by the participants. Before beginning participant recruitment, I obtained approval of the IRB at the University of Georgia to ensure the practices for the research were in alignment with the safety of the participants. The initial point of contact on Facebook was the participants themselves, who were individually and directly approached by me based on their membership in MBDNA. I started recruiting participants by informally contacting the potential participants via a Facebook message to form a professional relationship that could help in recruitment. During the informal conversation, I screened the participants to ensure they met the inclusion criteria. It was possible that not all students who were approached through Facebook would respond. As a result, I approached as many students as possible who were relevant to the characteristics sought from participants in the study in order to increase the chances of obtaining a final sample of seven participants. Since no students had any contact with me prior to the study, there was no conflict of interest. Due to the sensitive nature of the research inquiry, one of my primary concerns was

to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. As a result, no personal information about the participants or their institutions was published, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Once a participant showed interest, they were sent a recruitment document detailing the research project. All participants were identified only through a pseudonym that was assigned to them after recruitment. Further, an informed consent form was used during recruitment to ensure the participants were aware of their rights and they knew their participation was voluntary.

**Site access.** I sought the most diverse group of participants in terms of additional characteristics, such as gender and age. No cost was associated with the site access and recruitment method and no financial incentive was provided to the participants, in order to ensure lack of bias.

## Research Design and Rationale

The qualitative phenomenological research design was selected for this research study as it allowed for the collection of rich, in-depth data solely through the lived experiences of the participants. The perceptions of the participants based on lived experiences helped expand the current understanding regarding African-American music doctoral candidates' lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South. Qualitative research was generally focused on exploring a phenomenon through an open-ended design that relied on the subjective experiences of the participants (Vagle, 2018). The fundamental focus of qualitative research is on developing a constructive understanding and meaning regarding the environment in which the participants function and the experiences they have (Schneier, 2017). In this study, the qualitative research method was selected because the study's purpose was to explore the lived, subjective experiences of African-American music doctoral candidates who have attended PWIs regarding unequal and racist

treatment from the people who operate and work at the institution. Specifically, the use of the qualitative method helped me obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences without stifling the data due to previously developed hypotheses. Instead, the themes evolved from the experiences that were shared by the participants directly.

Researchers can choose from multiple research designs when conducting qualitative research (Flick, 2018). Some of these designs, that are relevant to the present study, include phenomenological, case study, and an ethnographical research design (Schneier, 2017). In this study, the focus was on the subjective experiences of the participants. Since the purpose of this study was to explore lived experiences and meaning of such experiences directly through the words of the participants, data collection consisted of interviews with the participants (Schneier, 2017). Further, my goal was to discover themes that emerged from the experiences of the participants and suggest recommendations from such themes (instead of exploring such recommendations from the participants).

The phenomenological research design, particularly the transcendental phenomenological research design, was used in this study because it was found to be appropriate for the purpose of the research (Wilson, 2015). A central tenant of the phenomenological research design is the process of bracketing (Wilson, 2015). Through bracketing, the researcher limits his or her experiences, preconceptions, and biases to understand a research phenomenon through the lived experiences of those who have experienced it firsthand (Wilson, 2015). In the transcendental phenomenological design, the researcher focuses on the interpretations and descriptions of the participant more than the researcher's interpretation of the shared experiences (Wilson, 2015). In this process, the research uses reflexivity, which is the capacity for self-evaluations with respect to experiences, thoughts, and biases (Wilson, 2015). It is important that the preconceptions,

experiences, and biases of the researcher are not reflected in the data in order to avoid the manipulation of the experiences shared by the participants (Wilson, 2015).

In this phenomenological research study, I explored the lived experiences of the participants through their words instead of proving or disproving a prior hypothesis. Through a focus on the lived experiences of the participants, I sought to reflect the meaning and contexts of the experiences as shared by the participants themselves. In the qualitative research method, unlike in the quantitative research method, the goal is not to prove or disprove a previously formulated hypothesis but rather to rely on the experiences shared by the participants to develop themes (Vagle, 2018). As a result, the phenomenological research design was appropriate for this study.

## Research Methods

**Data collection methods.** In this study, data were collected using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with the participants via FaceTime or Skype. Interview as a method of data collection can be divided into three types: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Vagle, 2018). In this study, I used the semi-structured approach to interviews, which is a method in which the researcher prepares an interview protocol that consists of questions that are open-ended and flexible but also provided a framework to the interview (Vagle, 2018). A semi-structured interview allows both the possibility of open-ended sharing of experiences and ensuring the participant responses answer the research questions (Vagle, 2018).

I scheduled interviews with the participants based on their responses to the initial email consisting of the recruitment document detailing the nature of the study. An interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed based on the purpose of the study and the research questions and was used to ensure that all participants were presented with the same initial questions during the

interviews in order to minimize the possibility of researcher bias. The interview protocol consisted of 14 interview questions. These interview questions were based on the research questions and previous studies with a similar focus. The research questions were grounded in the core tenets of CRT, which included (a) the recognition that racism is commonplace and not an anomaly, b) challenging the dominant idea of White privilege, c) offering a transformative and committed response to social justice, d) analyzing and passing on knowledge of racial subordination continuing in contemporary society to expand awareness, and e) using a transdisciplinary perspective (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017); questions 11-14 were based on these constructs. Three themes that also inspired the interview questions were used to develop the research questions: racist treatment, racial microaggression, and a transdisciplinary view on the context within which racial microaggression takes place. Interview Questions 9 and 10 were based on the phenomenological research design and explored the context of the participants' experiences. Questions 7 and 8 were focused on the administrators, faculty, and academic advisors at the PWI in alignment with the research questions. Questions 1-6 were inspired by previous research studies with a similar focus, including Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall, and Lewis (2012), Mills (2017), and Robertson (2017).

The collected data from the interviews were analyzed and conclusions were drawn from the emergent themes and subthemes that would help answer the research questions. All of the interviews were recorded using a mechanical audio recorder, the permission for which was obtained during the initial informed consent (Appendix B) form signing.

**Stages of data collection.** After I obtained the contact details of the potential participants matching the inclusion criteria for the study from the Facebook group MBDNA, I sent an email

containing a recruitment document that will include information about the research problem, the purpose of the study, the research methods, and the significance of the findings. In the document, I included my contact information (my phone number and email address). Potential participants were encouraged to ask questions and obtain clarification regarding any issues they might have regarding the study. Once an individual showed interest in participating in the study, an informed consent form was sent to that individual via email. The informed consent form detailed the rights of the participants, the expectations from the participants, and the nature of the study. Signing the informed consent form indicated that the participant read what was contained in the informed consent form and agreed to partake in the study voluntarily with the right to withdraw at any moment. Signing and returning the informed consent form confirmed the participation of the individual.

Once participants consented to participation, I scheduled an interview with each participant. Based on the geographical proximity of the participants my residence, the interviews were conducted either in-person or virtually. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in a public library in a private room. Virtual interviews were conducted using the video communication applications FaceTime and Skype. The date and time of the interviews decided according to the convenience of me and the participant. On the day of the interview, I arrived 15 minutes earlier for the face-to-face interviews to ensure the requirements for the interviews were in place. Once the participant arrived or appeared on the application, I greeted the participant and ensured that they were comfortable. After an informal conversation to determine whether the participants were comfortable with the environment and willing to begin the interview, I read the informed consent form once to confirm the rights of the participants and the expectations during the study. Next, I started the audio recorder and began asking the questions from the interview

protocol. Since the questions were open-ended, the interviews were driven by the participants sharing their experiences. I asked for further explanations to ensure the experiences shared were in-depth. However, my input was minimal, and the interview was mainly focused on the participant.

Each interview lasted for approximately 45-60 min. I ensured that the participants felt comfortable in what they chose to share. Following the interview, I developed research transcripts using the audio recording and Microsoft Word. No third party was involved in developing the transcripts in order to ensure maximum confidentiality. An important part of the data collection process was maintaining the security and confidentiality of the participants and the data. In order to ensure proper data management, I stored digital and physical data from the study in a password-protected personal computer and locked cabinet. No one other than me and my dissertation chair were provided access to identifying information. I followed the guidelines provided by the IRB for maintaining the protection of the data and the security of the participants' identity. Following the transcription of the data, I replaced all personal information about the participants with the pseudonyms provided to them. Any identifiable information was either redacted or translated to ensure confidentiality.

**Data analysis procedures.** Data were analyzed using the modified van Kaam approach by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas' (1994) van Kaam approach for data analysis allowed the researcher the ability to translate phenomenological data into themes. In this process, there were seven steps: listing, elimination, clustering, validation, description of experience, description of meaning, and composite meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Using the modified van Kaam approach (Moustakas, 1994), I reviewed the developed transcripts from the interviews and conducted a qualitative data analysis.

Following the transcription of the interviews, I reviewed the transcripts line-by-line and began the data analysis process through initial listing and grouping, which Moustakas (1994) described as horizonalization. During this process, following the recommendations of Moustakas (1994), I took each relevant quote with respect to the research phenomenon and the research questions for the study and listed them together for the respective participant. The process of elimination helped me decide which quotes among those listed were the most applicable to the research questions, reflecting the lived experience of the participant in sufficient detail (Moustakas, 1994). The process of clustering helped me group the participants' experiences under relevant thematic labels (Moustakas, 1994). The clustering lead to the emergence of categories reflecting the primary themes found in the lived experience of the participant.

Following clustering, the researcher initiates validation (Moustakas, 1994). In Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam approach, validation is the final identification of themes on the basis of their application. The developed themes at this stage were verified based on their applicability to the research questions. The next step was the description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). During this stage, I used the relevant themes developed so far to create a specific personal description for all participants in relation to their experience (Moustakas, 1994). The next stage in the data analysis process was description of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). In this stage, I used the textual description to identify the essence of the experience of the participants and develop the meaning of each participant's experience by incorporating the developed themes regarding focus of the study (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the last stage in the modified van Kaam approach by Moustakas (1994) was composite description; in this stage, I developed the meaning and essence of the participants' experience as a whole group instead of as individuals.

## Pilot Study

Before beginning the main study, I conducted a pilot study. The pilot study helped me determine the validity of the interview protocol in the data collection process determined for the study in order to provide responses that were relevant to the purpose of the study (Flick, 2018). Specifically, the pilot study helped me know whether the interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews was intelligible, effective, and relevant based on the feedback obtained from the pilot study participants in response to the interview protocol. Additionally, I learned whether the structure of the interviews enabled by the protocol was sufficient for the data collection process (Flick, 2018). On the basis of the results and feedback from the pilot study, I made adjustments to the interview protocol as needed.

I conducted the pilot study with the sample population and in a similar environment as that specified for main data collection process. I used one participant, who was not part of the main study, to conduct a pilot interview. The pilot study was conducted in a public library in a private room and, similar to the main data collection process, an interview was conducted with the interview protocol lasting 45-60 min. A signed informed consent form was required of the participant in order to partake in the pilot study. The interview conducted as part of the pilot study was recorded and the same measures for data protection were applied. Feedback from the participant regarding the quality of the questions was obtained at the end of the interview through a briefing session. I analyzed the responses of the participant and the feedback from the participant to further revise the interview protocol and ensure that it was in alignment with the needs of the study.

## Trustworthiness of Data

In a qualitative study, the trustworthiness of the data is determined through four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability. Credibility refers to the establishment of findings that are believable from the point of view of the research participant (Flick, 2018). A threat to the credibility of the findings is reflective of the researcher's bias (Flick, 2018). In order to ensure the credibility of the study, I used a mechanical recorder during the interviews. Further, following the development of the transcripts, I conducted a transcript review, during which the participants were provided a copy of their transcripts to ensure their views were reflected accurately in the final transcript (Schneier, 2017). Based on the feedback of the participants, changes were made until the participant was satisfied with their transcript. A similar review took place after the data analysis was conducted, as part of the member checking process. During the member checking process, the participants were provided a copy of the data analysis relevant to them in order to ensure their views were reflected adequately in the final analysis. Similar to the transcript review, feedback obtained from the member checking process was reflected in the final analysis. Also, I reflected upon my own personal behavior during the data collection process to ensure limited possibility of bias.

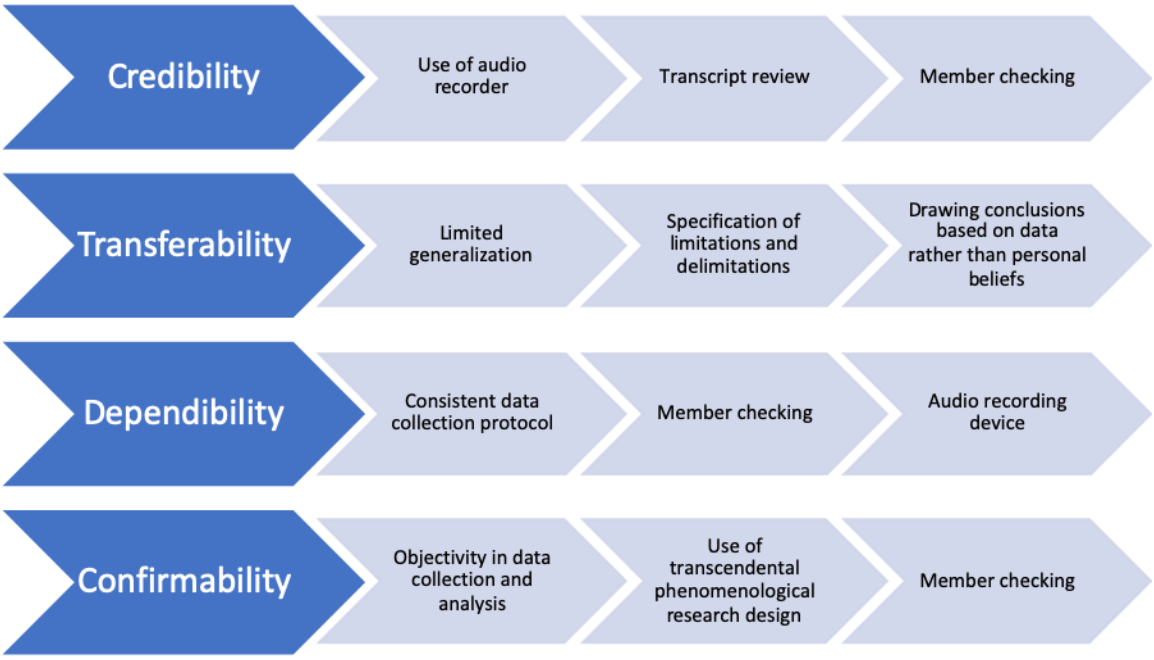


*Figure 1.* Measures for trustworthiness of data.

Transferability can be defined as the extent to which the findings of the study can be generalized to other settings (Schneier, 2017). In this study, I ensured transferability through specification of limitations as well as delimitations, as done in chapter 1, to ensure the scope of the findings was defined. Further, I ensured that the findings of the study were not generalized beyond the scope of the study. Instead, the findings were applied to explain the themes found within the experiences of participants with certain characteristics. My role in data analysis was limited to identifying the themes that emerged from the data, and not drawing any additional unwarranted conclusions. Dependability can be described in terms of replicability or the degree to which it is possible to attain the same findings when the same phenomenon is observed again (Vagle, 2018). In order to ensure dependability, the researcher will develop a consistent data collection protocol that will be used for data analysis, coding, data preparation and management, data assessment, and data organization (Vagle, 2018). Further, I used member checking to ensure the verification and suggestions of the participants were included. The use of an audio recording

device and transcript review also helped me ensure dependability. Confirmability can be described as the extent to which the findings of the study can be corroborated by others (Flick, 2018). Confirmability was ensured through objectivity during the research. I ensured there was little or no intrusion through personal bias, preconceptions, and opinions during the data collection and analysis process (Flick, 2018). Confirmability was ensured in part because I focused on descriptions of the views of the participant expressed in their own words. The transcript review process as well as the use of an audio recording device during the interviews also helped maintain objectivity and, thus ensured confirmability.

**Ethical Considerations**

In this study, the ethical considerations were based on the principals established in the Belmont Report (Flick, 2018). These principals are respect for the persons, beneficence, and justice (Flick, 2018). Justice can be described as ensuring the research process is not exploitative of the participants and the data collection process remains reasonable (Schneier, 2017). This was partly ensured through the use of informed consent form signing—which was a requirement for participation in the study (Schneier, 2017). The informed consent form helped establish justice by educating the participants about their rights and the expectations from them during the study. The participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw from the research process at any time without penalty.

In this study, beneficence was established through the reduction of possible risks and maximization of potential benefits to the participants (Vagle, 2018). In order to do so, I provided definite details regarding the importance of the research findings. Finally, respect for persons was ensured through participant autonomy and by treating the participants with respect during the entire process. The use of the informed consent form allowed participants to decide whether

to participate in the study or not on the basis of complete information about their rights and expectations, but also through explaining the possibility of withdrawal without any repercussions.

Possible ethical issues identified for the study included compromised confidentiality, conflict of interest, coercion from the researcher, sharing of data with third party, and unauthorized use of consent and premises (Flick, 2018). As I did not have any prior relationship with the individuals who participated in the study, the possibility of conflict of interest was minimal. During participant recruitment, I ensured no participant was recruited who may have had a prior relationship with other participants or with me (Vagle, 2018). Although I had familiarity with the topic studied, I ensured that this familiarity only influenced the choices regarding dispassionate data collection and data analysis processes and not conclusions.

Maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was a significant concern for me. This concern was more important with respect to the protection of any identifiable information in the final results to be published (Vagle, 2018). In order to ensure privacy, confidentiality, and security, I stored digital and physical data from the study in a locked, personal computer and locked cabinet. No one other than me and my dissertation chair had access to the data. Also, the data collection process did not commence until the approval of the university IRB was obtained. The researcher must follow the guidelines provided by the IRB for maintaining the protection of the data and the security of the participants' identity (Schneier, 2017). Following the transcription of the data, the researcher must replace all personal information about the participants with the pseudonyms provided to them (Vagle, 2018). Any identifiable information must be redacted (Vagle, 2018). All digital and physical records from the data collected will be stored securely for a period of 5 years, after which they will be

permanently destroyed. I will use a shredder to destroy the physical data and software for data shredding to destroy the digital data.

**Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore African-American music doctoral candidates' lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South. The final sample included seven minority/non-White (preferably African American) individuals who attended a doctoral program in music at PWIs. I recruited the participants through the Facebook group MBDNA. I sent interested students a recruitment document detailing the needs of the research. Data were collected using semi-structured, face-to-face or virtual interviews with the participants. Each interview lasted for approximately 45-60 min. Data were analyzed using the modified van Kaam approach by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas' (1994) van Kaam approach for data collection allows the researcher the ability to translate phenomenological data into themes. Trustworthiness of the data in this study was maintained through the use of a mechanical recorder, transcript verification by the participants, personal reflection, and specification of limitations as well as delimitations and the scope of the study, development of a consistent data collection protocol, and steps for objectify. Ethical considerations for the study were addressed through strategies for maintaining privacy, security, and confidentiality of the data through measures such as the use of a pseudonym, redaction of personally identifiable data in the final results, the use of informed consent forms, no access of the data to a third party, and storing both the digital and physical data in locked systems and cabinets.

# CHAPTER 4

## FINDINGS, RESULTS, AND INTERPRETATIONS

In this qualitative, phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences and perceptions of African Americans with doctoral degrees in music from PWIs in the U.S. South. The focus for this study was to identify unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South. The study was guided by CRT. The research questions sought to identify the issues of racial microaggression perceived by African Americans who earned doctoral degrees in music from PWIs, including their interactions with collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors and how such perceptions affected their experiences pursuing a doctoral degree in music. This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do African Americans music doctoral candidates at PWIs in the U.S. South describe their lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at these colleges or universities?
2. How do they describe their experiences with the phenomenon of racial microaggression from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors?
3. What are the contexts found within such situations as classes, meetings, and social functions where incidences of racial microaggression occur and that have affected African Americans with doctoral degrees in music?

Semi-structured interview data collection process, and the modified van Kaam approach for phenomenological data analysis process (Moustakas, 1994), were used in an attempt to

answer the research questions. Seven doctoral students who have completed a doctoral program in music at the selected PWIs located in the U.S. South were recruited using purposeful sampling with the following inclusion criteria: self-identified as African American and have graduated from a doctoral program in music from a PWI in the U.S. South. The participants were recruited from Facebook through the group MBDNA. After an initial recruitment post, the participants made initial contact with me via Facebook Messenger. I exchanged a few messages with the participants to screen for the inclusion criteria. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were sent an e-mail containing an invitation for the interview and an informed consent form to sign. Signed informed consent forms were collected prior to interviews.

The interviews were conducted individually via FaceTime or Skype at a time that was convenient for the participant. An interview protocol developed by me and based on the existing literature (see Appendix A) was used to guide the interviews. Interview data were digitally recorded and transcribed and then were sent to the participants via e-mail for the purpose of member checking prior to analysis.

The analysis was aided by the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12. The nodes and node hierarchies were used to visually represent the codes, themes, and relationships. The modified van Kaam approach (Moustakas, 1994) was conducted manually using the software despite the availability of automatic coding features. Manual coding allowed for me to have a deeper understanding of the data and have interpretations of meanings of the participants' experiences.

The modified van Kaam approach involves seven steps: (a) horizontalization, (b) reduction and elimination, (c) clustering and thematizing, (d) validation of invariant constituents, (e) individual textural description, (f) individual structural description, and (g) composite

description (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization refers to the process of reading and familiarizing oneself with the data (Moustakas, 1994). I uploaded the transcripts to NVivo 12, then read and sorted the data. Chunks of data were highlighted and assigned into nodes, the smallest units of meaning in the software. Nodes represented invariant constituents or the preliminary listing and grouping of the participants' relevant experiences. The research questions were used to determine relevant experiences. I identified as many invariant constituents as possible. The number of invariant constituents was then reduced in the second step, reduction and elimination (Moustakas, 1994). I self-inquired about whether the statements coded in the nodes were necessary and sufficient in determining the participants' experiences of unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs. The remaining nodes were then reviewed for relationships based on thematic meanings. Nodes with similar meanings were grouped to conduct clustering and thematizing (Moustakas, 1994). Validation of the themes (Moustakas, 1994) occurred on the basis of being explicitly expressed or implied in the data, and in being compatible with each other in answering the research questions. The validation was conducted through comparing the themes with the raw data to ensure that the raw data represented the themes and that the themes represented the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Individual textural description, individual structural description, and composite description involved writing narratives containing direct quotes from the data to create a descriptive integration of the themes derived from each participant, imaginative variation through emotional, social, and cultural connections between the participants' statements and the validated themes, and an integration of the findings through identifying the essence of the participants' experiences as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). The themes and narratives will be presented later in this chapter and will include interpretations based on the CRT.

## Participant Profiles

Seven African Americans with doctoral degrees in music at the selected PWIs located in the U.S. South participated in this study. Purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of participants who had experienced being a doctoral student who attended a doctoral program in music at the selected PWIs located in the U.S. South. A number from one to seven was used in place of the participants' names so that the participants' identities were concealed. Nonetheless, the participants' identities were known only to me as the researcher. The assigned numbers helped me identify and contact the participants for all follow-up regarding their participation. Below are descriptions of the participants.

Participant 1 has a Doctor of Musical Arts in Flute Performance. He is currently a college instructor at an HBCU. The 31-year-old has a bachelor's and master's degree in flute performance. The participant self-identified as a "Black gay man" and was in an interracial marriage. He chose to enroll at his selected PWI, as he was told that growing up in a low-income family granted him eligibility for a fellowship. In addition, the participant believed that living and studying in the South was more affordable than in any other region. Participant 1 defined racism as "when someone is treated differently based on who they are and what they look like really in the cultural stereotypes associated with that particular demographic." He started out in the foster care system and was adopted and raised by a White, single female mother with a daughter 5 year younger than him. The participant claimed to have grown up in a diverse community and had not experienced racism "on a regular basis."

Participant 2 has a Ph.D. in Music Education. She is currently the director of bands at an HBCU. She is 47 years old and has a BME and master's degree in music education. Participant 2 intentionally selected a PWI to complete her Ph.D. due to the reputation of the institution. The

participant claimed to have always wanted to teach at a college and be a director of bands but being a Black female did not make achieving her goals easier. However, having a degree from the school that was "number two in the country for music education" helped build her career. When asked about racism, she claimed "I would not say differential treatment but negative differential treatment because of your race." Given her definition, she stated that she has not experienced racism, but she also claimed "I do know, and I feel like I was treated very differently."

Participant 3 has a Ph.D. in Music Composition. The 42-year-old male has a bachelor's and master's degree in music composition. He is currently working as a director of bands at an HBCU. A doctorate degree in music composition can only be obtained in PWIs. His father-in-law also graduated from the same PWI where he earned his Ph.D. While the participant considered another institution close to where his aunt lived, the other institution only offered a DMA program and his aunt did not offer to let him stay with her. The PWI he chose was close to his father-in-law's home, and his father-in-law offered to let him stay with him for free. He also received a scholarship from his selected PWI. He defined racism as "When you have the opinion of another race being inferior or your race being superior to whatever racial identity is and your action life style, words, comments teaching, and mannerisms are that of either years of fear or they are inferior." Participant 3 had not shared any experiences of racism.

Participant 4 has a DMA in Vocal Performance. At 34 years old, she is working as an assistant professor at an HBCU. She has a bachelor's and master's degree in Vocal Performance. She earned her master's degree from a PWI. The PWI where she earned her DMA had the "exact program" that she wanted. Racism was defined by Participant 4 as "I would define racism as judgment of a person's ability and skills and ability based on their race and how they do

something. Well how well they can't do something because of the color of their skin." Participant 4 had a prevalent experience of racism. From a faculty member, he mentioned that he received offensive comments or was perceived as incapable.

Participant 5 has a Ph.D. in Music Education. He also has a bachelor's and master's degree in Music Education. He is 36 years old and employed as a high school teacher/band director. The participant's goal was to earn a doctorate degree and to live in a big city. He found an institution in the city he preferred. He met the advisor and was convinced to study with him. Participant 5 defined racism as:

> The power structure adds on to if you have a prejudice about a specific race. Usually it is Whites against other races because they have the power in that situation than that, in turn, affects policy that affects the way that those races are treated. In our case, is that blacks don't get the same access to things, they don't get the same benefit of the doubt. And that is really because of the way that the power structures are design.

Participant 5 grew up in a mostly Black community but had some White friends in elementary school. His circle of friends remained mostly Black until college where he studied at an HBCU. After college, he claimed to have experienced microaggressions.

Participant 6 has an Ed.D. in Music Education and a BME and MME in Music Education. She is 41 years old and is employed as a high school teacher/band director. Participant 6 chose the PWI from which she graduated due to the program that she wanted. The program allowed her to work as a graduate assistant while working on her degree. The school also had a reputation in the state. She believed that Blacks did not get the "same respect" as Whites, which was why she chose to earn her degree from a respected institution. She claimed Blacks needed to "stack" their

"resumé as much as possible." Participant 6 did not share any experiences with racism, but defined racism as:

> The first type of racism is of course when a person that believes that one's race makes them less than or one's race makes them more than. And then there are these institutional racism, which are structures that favor one group over another based on race or show less favor to one group over another based on race.

Participant 7 has a Ph.D. in Music Education. She also earned her BME and MM in Music Education. The 38-year-old works as an assistant professor of music at a PWI. She chose the PWI because it had a reputation of having "a very rigorous and competitive music education program." She also wanted to study under a specific professor "who basically wrote the majority of music education books." Her chosen PWI also offered her a scholarship and more research opportunities than other institutions. She knew some Black faculty who could be her mentor.

Participant 7 perceived racism as unprogressive. She claimed that the institution had racist practices, such as having separate homecoming events for Blacks and Whites. She also believed that Black students were treated "unfairly." She stated, "So for me, racism is being treated unfairly and being graded unfairly and unequally."

**Findings**

This section contains the participants' lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South. The findings are presented in the form of narratives with direct quotes from the participants to provide evidence. Analysis of the data revealed five themes: a) White privilege, b) impact on education, c) subtle discrimination, d) not taken seriously, and e) school environment. The participants described their lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist

treatment from the people who operate and work at these colleges or universities through the experience of White cohorts having more opportunities or having to work less hard. Racial microaggression from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors was experienced though had no impact on wanting to finish their education while experiencing subtle remarks and having racist experiences brushed aside. The school environment context, particularly the actions of the administrators, was found within such situations of racial microaggression that have affected African American music students. The themes are further described below.

**White privilege.** White privilege was experienced by all seven participants during their time at the PWI. The experience of White privilege was encountered in three ways: Black students receiving fewer opportunities than White students, Black students needing to work harder than White students, and/or Black students having more requirements for a course than White students. Participant 4 shared that despite having more "talent" and "work load" than her White cohorts, she was received research opportunities. Participant 4 stated, "White privilege was very prevalent and that my colleagues/classmates got opportunities that I know that I did not receive. I feel that it was based upon that they were of another race/persuasion than I."

Participant 1 also experienced similar situations and stated that his demographic as a Black man from a low-income family cost him the opportunities to gain teaching experience. He lost the experience to a White female colleague. Participant 1 shared:

> Meanwhile in this is for a doctoral program meanwhile there was a younger Caucasian actual former colleague of mine who was attending the same university in the same studio for her master's degree in performance. And she received the teaching [fellowship]. [But] she did not want to be a teacher, and everyone knew that, and she knew that as well. But because that was the money that the school had…. Meanwhile I

> am losing the opportunity of actually having the teaching experience which would make more sense for somebody who is pursuing a doctorate versus somebody who is pursuing their masters and lack teaching experience and the desire to teach.

Participant 1 explained that he felt that the school of music did not want to "invest" in him and left him to the scholarships afforded by the graduate school or nonprofit organizations. Participant 2 also shared the experience of incongruity in opportunities compared to her White colleagues:

> My Caucasian counterparts got the experience. They got to experience things in the program to make them better band directors and to make them better music educators. I wanted the same thing and I didn't get the teaching and the experience that they got because of my background (coming from an HBCU).

Participants 3, 5, and 6 believed that most White people did not realize they had White privilege. Participant 6 explained:

> I think that I've just gotten to the point where I realized that the lens through which some [White] people look to the world is so different than mine that they almost. They don't even realize what they're doing sometimes because I think a lot of times people think that they're not racist and they're not biased. But their actions speak differently. And they don't understand how that is. Because in their minds they think if they don't wear a hood and light crosses in your yard. They're not racist and that's not exactly the way racism truly works.

Some participants believed that Black students needed to work harder than White students. Participant 6 claimed that she made a conscious effort to be known and recognized by the upper administration. While she believed that the way the administration treated her was not

"overtly" racist, she also believed that her race played a part in her having to work harder than White students. Participant 6 also had the following experience:

> Being a Black student in a sea of White privilege, oftentimes, I felt as if there was a certain level of ease that they were able to walk through the program with that we didn't have. It was very clear in the way that assignments were handled, the way that due dates were handled, and the way that checkpoints were handled. It was always a benefit of the doubt if White students were not prepared. They would give them the benefit of the doubt. There was no benefit of the doubt for Black students. A Black student [or] a [Jewish student] didn't get that same [privilege].

Participant 7 claimed that she worked hard to avoid negative comments over her abilities and appearance, sharing that:

> Just to be honest with you, I just made sure they couldn't…they couldn't talk about my musical ability. They could not talk about my research ability. They could not talk about my physical appearance. I made sure that I was one hundred and ten percent. I don't try to reason with it. I know it's horrible, how I tried to get over it.

**Impact on education.** The participants generally did not let racial microaggression impact their education in terms of finishing the doctorate degree at the PWI. Participant 2 shared that the experiences of racial microaggression may have motivated her to finish her degree. Participant 2 shared "No, if anything it made me want to pursue it even more because I just wanted to show them that they were wrong about me." Participant 7 may have also been motivated by the experience of racial microaggression, as she shared the community of Black musicians encouraged her to be one of the few Black females with a doctorate degree in string music education. Participant 7 also shared that she almost gave up. She also sought help from her

mother, who suggested a movie to comfort her. Participant 7 mentioned “I did think that I wanted to stop. I didn't. I cried a few days about it. It was hard.” For Participant 3, the experience of racial microaggression motivated him to finish his education to be able to teach at an HBCU to help Black students. Participant 4 shared that her experience of racial microaggression did not impact her education at a PWI; however, she preferred not to be employed at a PWI. Similar to Participant 7, Participant 4 also shared her desire “to give opportunities to those students who are considered minority and to really treat them with fairness.”

Participant 1 also did not let racial microaggression affect his education, saying that “It didn't affect me wanting to continue my studies and even during the process really there was nothing that could get in the way of me finishing the degree. It was just something that I was going to get done.” Nonetheless, Participant 1 shared the experiences of microaggression may have impacted his confidence as a performer.

**Subtle discrimination.** The participants generally stated that they did not experience racism while obtaining their doctorate degree from a PWI apart from subtle discrimination. Experiences of racial microaggression were also generally isolated cases. Participant 2 shared “So there was one professor [who treated me with racial microaggression], but I wouldn't say it was prevalent among the university.” Participant 3 also experienced something similar, sharing:

> Okay so you have a major professor. You have other professors. You have administration. So, from an administration standpoint I didn't really experience any racism from other units in the college. I did not really experience racism but in certain particular classes. And maybe snide comments I've heard of afterwards, like the microaggressions particularly.

Participant 3 further explained that being the only African-American in class, the participant could not confide in anyone about subtle racist experiences. Although the participant did not mention what types of comments were said, Participant 3 mentioned "A lot of them were smart they know how to tread the line to make sure anything that they do, they come up as blatant with racism. So, you can never pinpoint anything." However, some participants experienced being made to feel not part of the group. Participant 3 continued, sharing:

> I had one female instructor. And the student body in the School of Music was very White. I'm the first African-American to get a Ph. D in Music Education from that [PWI]. I was always the only black student in those classes up until another student came in two years later. I played in their wind ensemble and symphonic wind ensemble. I was one of no more than four or five black players in the group. So, it was almost kind of jarring the difference between the celebration of the urban [city] and diversity at the rest of the university by going into the School of Music. It was like I was absolutely completely in the minority.

Participant 6 claimed that the PWI she attended was not overtly racist, but she learned to place herself apart from her White cohorts. She stated "The environment was fine. I mean it was, [it] was collegial enough to not make me feel outcast but I also knew how to situate myself." She felt like she was not part of the group, as she and another African-American cohort were made to feel invisible. However, the African-American females refused to be treated as such. Participant 6 mentioned "And so, we would not be ignored even at times when it was…we were clearly being ignored. We both had our own ways of making sure that they knew we were there."

Participant 6 shared her experience of discrimination from one professor. Her class for special topics and music education consisted of her and another Black woman, and about eight

White men. The participant perceived that the professor discriminated against her and her female cohort through racial microaggression. Incidences of racial microaggression experienced by the participant included being ignored when she spoke or having her research rejected. The participant stated:

> Like you said, a micro aggression. But. In class, the instructor would ask a question and I would say the answer and I would get nothing back. Afterwards, one of my White male counterparts would give the exact same answer and it was brilliant and it became like the running joke in the class amongst my classmates. It was like she couldn't hear my voice at all. And then there were other times when my topics that I wanted to research, and study were not valued and was not accepted. I was told that it was not scholarly enough. And if I wanted to focus on women on the podium and their experiences and all of those things. I couldn't explore them, and I really wanted to study them. I also wanted to study prevalent African-American women in music education. That wasn't scholarly enough. I wanted to cover research that was pertinent to me and my experiences.

Other subtle discrimination experienced by the participants included having their musical abilities undermined, as shared by Participant 5, having their work nit-picked, and being graded unfairly, as shared by Participant 7. Participant 7 shared her experience during her summer term in 2009:

> Somehow, on a test. I would get a grade of 80 percent and someone else next to me would get 100 percent. So, one of those times I looked at the guy's paper [who happens] to be a Caucasian. And I saw that we had the exact same answers. I saw both of the test papers. I went to the professor and I said [to the professor], “Why is my grade lower

when we had the exact same answers?" And she says, "Oh, that must have been a mistake. I can fix that."

Participants 1 and 2 believed that acts of subtle discrimination may have been rooted in prejudice. Both participants perceived that prejudice was difficult to eradicate and that people's opinions were difficult to change. Both participants also claimed to accept their situation and worked hard to achieve their goals.

**Not taken seriously.** The issue of racial microaggression was perceived as not taken seriously by the administrators at the PWI. Some participants reported the incidences of racial microaggression only for the issues to be "brushed under the rug," as stated by Participant 7. Participant 7 stated "I would bring it up sometimes. It was brushed under the rug or they would make it seem like it was okay, or just an isolated event and it would never happen again." Participant 5 also had similar experiences when he approached his academic advisor about an issue faced by another African-American student. The issue involved eating in a restaurant owned by Paula Deen, who at that time had an issue with racist remarks and using the "N-word." Participant 5 perceived that the staff and the administrators "did not care" about the issue and that they were using funds of the state university to support the business of someone who was being recognized as a racist. Participant 5 shared "I actually went and spoke to my advisor about it and said you know am I overreacting because this is something that's really getting under my skin because I follow the news often." Participant 5 explained that the issue may not be experienced in other colleges but in the college of music where there were only two African-American professors, such issues were often not taken seriously.

Participant 1 experienced being brushed off by her studio professor. Participant 1 claimed that he lacked the support he needed to address issues. The participant also shared:

> I really only experienced microaggressions with faculty members and unfortunately my studio professor was someone who had a lot of micro aggression and someone who was very dismissive of any specific goal that I may have had for a particular reason that didn't fit into her beliefs.

**School environment.** Racial microaggression that had affected African-American music students was in the school environment. The majority of the participants perceived that the faculty and administration were "chaotic," as shared by Participant 1. The lack of order within the university was believed to have led to the lack of communication of racial subordination, and the lack of implementation of school policies that might protect minority group students. Participant 4 claimed:

> So, there are policies in place. People just don't always follow the rules. So, there is something already in place that they can do. But like I said because of people's personal feelings and their personal convictions and what they think is right they don't. They forget that there are rules and laws and policies. Which is why some people tend to get in trouble because they forget about it. They go with their own personal views. And that was written as a policy. So, there are policies that's already established at every university. The people that are in these administrative positions just don't follow that policy.

Participant 4 added that she felt more and more isolated as she came closer to finishing her doctorate, especially during exams and during her selection of her dissertation committee. Participant 1 felt like the institution made him feel like he was being given a favor while Participant 2 felt like an "experiment." Participant 2 shared:

> The environment the vibe I felt going to school there, it was like, I don't know if it felt like I was a new puppy to a family who had never had a puppy before. It felt like I was an experiment. I felt like I did not belong, and some people definitely made me realize I was not supposed to be there.

Participant 1 further shared that the PWI he went to "exploits" African-American students such that, despite their struggles and success stories, they were just numbers announced during graduation to entice enrollees with "diverse population." Participant 1 noted:

> And there's a clear divide amongst the African-American community when it comes to college at [PWI] or college at [HBCU]. That is not to say that [PWI] does not have a diverse population, but it definitely lacks diversity. And unfortunately, you know in their attempts to promote their diversity it's almost like exploitation where at every graduation they say you know we graduate this many African-American students. That's the most in the history of the university. There seem to be nothing behind it besides numbers again.

**Summary**

In this qualitative, phenomenological study, I aimed to explore the lived experiences and perceptions—regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South—of African Americans with doctoral degrees in music. Qualitative data were collected from seven participants through semi-structured interviews. The interview transcripts were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using the modified van Kaam approach (Moustakas, 1994) to reveal the lived experiences of the participants regarding unequal and racist treatment during their time working on a doctoral degree from a PWI. The results revealed that African-American students generally experienced subtle, rather than overt, forms of racism through racial microaggression. Racist issues were also generally not taken seriously by White

administrators. The experiences, however, generally did not discourage the participants from finishing their degrees. In addition, some participants found the experiences of racism to be motivating. These findings may be related to positive coping strategies generally practiced by African Americans. The context of the PWI environment may have contributed to situations of racial microaggression that have affected African-American music students, as biases and prejudice were often culturally embedded. The conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for further study will be detailed in Chapter 5.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of African Americans with doctoral degrees in music regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South. Using CRT as a conceptual framework, I attempted to discover the issues of racial microaggression perceived by African Americans who earned doctoral degrees from PWIs and their interactions with college administrators, faculty, and academic advisors, and how such perceptions affected matriculation.

The population of interest in this study was music doctoral candidates of color who attended PWIs located in the U.S. South. I used purposive sampling to recruit seven participants from the MBDNA Facebook group; this small sample size was due to my in-depth focus on the participants' experience for this study (Vagle, 2018). The demographics for the participants were as follows: age ranged from 31 to 47 years, gender identification was three men and four women, and, specifically, four of the participants identified as Black. One participant self-identified as gay. I used a qualitative, transcendental, phenomenological research design and collected data through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with participants—using an interview protocol that had 14 questions based on the core tenets of CRT.

Interview transcripts were analyzed using NVivo12 software and a modified van Kaam approach (Moustakas, 1994). This analysis yielded five themes: white privilege, impact on education, subtle discrimination, not taken seriously, and school environment. The findings were

situated within CRT and the existing literature to present the following five results of the study: the participants reported experiencing White privilege, most commonly in the form of receiving fewer opportunities than their White peers; the participants reported that the racial microaggressions they experienced had no impact on their persistence in the institution; the participants reported that their White colleagues unconsciously discriminated against them; the participants reported that microaggressions were not taken seriously and White colleagues could not recognize their own biases; and the context of the school environment contributed to participants' experiences of microaggressions. This chapter will present the conclusions from the study as well as recommendations for practice and implications for future research. The following section offers conclusions in response to each research question and is a summary of the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants, situated within the literature that formed the framework for this study.

## Conclusions

This section presents the conclusions of this dissertation, building upon the evidence presented in Chapter 4, presenting the conclusions in light of the research questions that undergird the study, and contextualizing the findings within the existing literature.

**Research question 1: How do African American music doctoral candidates at PWIs in the U.S. South describe their lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from people who operate or work at these colleges or universities?** The findings surrounding the first theme of the results—white privilege—shed the most light on the first research question concerning participants' lived experiences of unequal and racist treatment. All participants reported experiencing white privilege as students of color in music doctoral programs at PWIs in the U.S. South. These findings closely corresponded with CRT's central

contentions that racism is not an anomaly and that those in power will seek to retain their power and, therefore, that racism is ingrained within the dominant culture of many institutions—including PWIs (Harper et al., 2018; Lee, 2018; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Researchers reported that white privilege affected their experiences in three specific ways: they perceived that Black students received fewer opportunities than White students, Black students needed to work harder than White students, and Black students had higher requirements for coursework than White students (Harper et al., 2018; Lee, 2018; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). For example, one participant reported that White students more often received the benefit of the doubt for failing to meet course requirements. Another participant reported receiving a grade of 80 on an assignment when giving the same response as a White student, who received a grade of 100.

**Research question 2: How do they describe their experiences with the phenomenon of racial microaggression from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors?**

The findings regarding the second research question showed that participants experienced microaggressions in two forms: particular microaggressions, usually perpetuated by one or two problematic faculty members within a given doctoral program, and generalized microaggressions, which concerned the culture and climate of their doctoral programs. Regarding particular microaggressions, for example, one participant reported being repeatedly ignored by one faculty member when she spoke in class but when White male students gave the same responses as her in class, the professor would praise their responses to the extent that the professor's differential treatment of her became a running joke amongst the students in the class. More broadly, multiple participants reported having their research ideas undermined or their performances or work more scrutinized than their White peers'.

Most participants reported generalized microaggressions, both in exclusion, or being made to feel like they were not a part of the group in their programs, and in the sense that microaggressions were not perceived by White colleagues and taken seriously when they reported them. This sense that microaggressions were not perceived by White colleagues, and not taken seriously when they were reported, aligns with CRT's assertion that the notion of colorblindness, or the idea that White people do not consider the races of those with whom they interact, perpetuates racism because it enables White people to overlook racial minorities' experiences with discrimination and prejudice (Dávila, 2014; DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016).

**Research question 3: What are the contexts found within such situations as classes, meetings, and social functions where incidences of racial microaggression occur and that have affected African Americans with doctoral degrees in music?** The third research question focused on the situational contexts of microaggressions as well as how they have affected the lived experiences of African Americans with doctoral degrees in music. In the contexts of microaggressions, participants most commonly reported incidents of microaggressions in their relationships with faculty—both in classroom and advising contexts—and, most commonly, reported generalized microaggressions in their relationships with peers in the program. The finding that particular microaggressions were most often perpetuated by faculty in doctoral programs corresponds with previous findings that students of color often perceive discriminatory and racialized behavior from the employees of PWIs who are generally most responsible for encouraging students (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Burt et al., 2018; Keith et al., 2017). It also corresponds with the previous finding that racial microaggressions can be perpetrated by instructors in the classroom (Lino et al., 2017).

A key finding about the situational context of microaggressions was that the majority of participants reported that the institutional context to address microaggressions was chaotic and ineffective, largely because of a lack of communication and enforcement of existing policies. Several other participants perceived their institutional context to be dehumanizing in that they thought their institutions exploited their completion of their programs to use them as a statistic of students of color who graduated with a doctoral degree. Multiple participants reported that they felt that, in doing this, their institutions treated them more as a number than as a human being.

## Interpretation of the Results

A phenomenological analysis of the revealed lived experiences of African American with doctoral degrees in music regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South was conducted. This section contains the interpretation of the findings in relation to CRT and existing literature presented in the literature review.

**Experience of White privilege**. One of the core tenets of CRT was to challenge the dominant idea of White privilege (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). While the participants generally perceived that they did not experience racism, White privilege—that is, advantages received by White students while Black students were disadvantaged—may be considered a form of racism (Harris, 2016). Participants cited more opportunities given to White colleagues, differing degree requirements, and more work expected as examples of experiencing the effects of White privilege. The type of racism experienced by the participants may be categorized as a modern form of racism, which may not be overtly seen but may be aversive and symbolic (Locke & Trolian, 2018).

**Racial microaggression having no impact on dropping out of the PWI.** CRT encompasses the concept that African-American students may be encouraged to complete their

Ph.D. due to the experience of racism (Harper et al., 2018; Lee, 2018; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017). Contrary to Tinto's (2012) findings that perception of negative relationships with academic advisors and faculty will more likely lead to lack of motivation in African-American students completing their doctoral programs, the majority of participants of this study claimed that they were not discouraged from completing their degrees. Conversely, their demographic status as a Black student may have motivated them to achieve their goals. Hunn, et al. (2015) suggested that African-American students had higher amounts of coping strategies whereas Proctor et al. (2017) suggested that African-American students generally had positive coping strategies, as evidenced by Participant 7 when she stated, "I did think that I wanted to stop. I didn't. I cried a few days about it. It was hard. My mom came to me."

**Experienced subtle discrimination.** Subtle discrimination may fall under racial microaggression in the form of microinvalidation, microinsult, and microassault (Locke & Trolian, 2018). The participants generally believed that their White counterparts were often unaware of their privileges, although findings revealed that they may also unconsciously discriminate upon their non-White counterparts (Lino et al., 2017; Tao et al., 2017).

**Racial microaggression not taken seriously.** In CRT, racism is perceived to be culturally embedded (McClain & Perry, 2017); therefore, people might find being objective and colorblind to be challenging. Prejudice may lead to a form of racial discrimination that may be disadvantageous for racial or ethnic minorities (Tao et al., 2017). Although, sometimes unconsciously, some White individuals may perform racist actions such as ignoring issues (Beaulieu, 2016). Wong and Jones (2018) explained that White individuals were generally incapable of recognizing their own biases. These findings may also explain the subtle rather than overt racism experienced by the participants (Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018).

**The context of school environment.** Similar to the existing literature, the participants of this study generally experienced racial microaggression in the context of educational institutions through microassaults and microinvalidations. Microassaults are considered environmental, non-verbal, and verbal communications defined by insensitivity and rudeness that insult a person's racial identity and heritage (Beaulieu, 2016; Kanter et al., 2017). Remarks from professors that undermined the abilities of an African-American student are considered a form of microassault (Ellis et al., 2018). Microinvalidations are highlighted by experiences of subtle negation or exclusion, which were experienced by some of the participants (Wintner et al., 2017).

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed as ways to better understand or improve the experiences of students of color, especially Black students, enrolled in music doctoral programs at PWI in the U.S. South. Even more broadly, these recommendations could be used to better understand and improve the experiences of Black students enrolled in doctoral programs in various disciplines across PWIs in the United States These recommendations are based on the results from this study and are framed within the context of the existing literature on microaggressions experienced by minorities in academia. Recommendations are suggestions for higher education institutions and especially for White faculty, staff, classmates, and administrators who work with students of color at PWIs.

**Require periodic training on implicit biases for all faculty and every employee who plays an educational or advisory role.** Research has demonstrated that a key kind of racism is cognitive racism, which concerns how people view minorities, rather than specific laws or policies (Lilly et al., 2018). Researchers have also shown that cognitive racism is more difficult to detect and slower to change than more traditional forms of racism (Lilly et al., 2018; Locke &

Trolian, 2018). Furthermore, researchers have shown that White individuals tend to view racism as minimally present, if present at all (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Keith, 2016; Parsons, 2017), and that prejudice against people of color is unconscious—stemming from views that emerged due to social conditioning (Cothran, 2016). In light of these findings, it seems possible that the White faculty members and university employees that perpetuated discriminatory treatment and microaggressions may not have been intentionally doing so. Furthermore, every participant reported that many of their White colleagues who perpetuated a climate rife with microaggressions had no idea that they did so. Therefore, a clear policy recommendation that proceeds from this study is for PWIs to institute mandatory, periodic training for all educators and advisors about implicit bias and outcomes of unchecked implicit racial bias.

**Ensure that all employees of universities are aware of the university's policies on discrimination, prejudice, and microaggressions.** Participants in this study reported that their institutional contexts exacerbated their experiences of microaggressions. Several specifically reported that a lack of knowledge or enforcement of existing policies on discrimination or inclusion contributed to the indifference with which their White colleagues responded to their experiences of microaggressions, and the exclusion they felt from their doctoral programs. In light of this finding, universities should take measures to ensure that all university employees are aware of the university's policies on discrimination, prejudice, and microaggressions and that they are aware of the penalties for violating these policies. This step is especially important in light of previous findings that educational institutions tend to reflect majoritarian (White) narratives and that faculty members at these institutions are likely to also adopt these narratives when interacting with students (Patton, 2015). Therefore, ensuring that all university employees are aware of policies on diversity and microaggressions could help counteract this trend and

make the institutional contexts of PWIs more amenable to students of color who experience microaggressions.

**Develop organizations and networks on campus specifically oriented towards supporting and ensuring the success of Black doctoral students.** Researchers have shown that Black students at PWIs move towards specific spaces and individuals in order to improve their sense of belonging on campus (Parsons, 2017). Researchers have also shown that PWIs can create campus organizations to ensure that the people that Black students turn to are best equipped to promote not only their sense of belonging but their academic success as well (Oliver et al., 2017). Not a single participant in this study reported being supported by an organization on campus or by faculty members. While this might have to do with the research design and, in particular, with the questions posed to participants on the interview protocol, this also might represent a significant area of potential to improve the experiences of Black students or students of color enrolled in doctoral programs at PWIs.

**Recommendations for future research.** This study provided descriptive evidence that Black students enrolled in music doctoral programs in PWIs in the U.S. South experience microaggressions in their doctoral programs and PWIs. Furthermore, although Black students are increasingly attaining doctoral degrees, they still receive doctoral degrees at significantly lower rates than their White counterparts (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Due to demographic shifts and increased commitment to inclusion, institutions of higher education will see more students of color in doctoral programs across disciplines, likely including music. Therefore, it is imperative that institutions of higher education, especially PWIs, understand how Black students experience microaggressions in doctoral programs and how these microaggressions impact their higher education experiences overall.

***Investigate whether this study's findings generalize across academic disciplines and regions of the United States*** In this study, I specifically examined the experiences of Black students in doctoral music programs in PWIs located in the U.S. South. However, there was no evidence in this study that these findings would be confined to music programs, and none of the many studies cited in the literature review exclusively focused on music departments. Therefore, it is highly possible that these findings translate across doctoral programs in many disciplines across all regions of the United States. However, this should be empirically investigated by future research.

***Specifically examine the experiences of Black female students in doctoral programs to investigate how race intersects with gender.*** Previous research has found that Black female students are more likely to have their occupational and family background influence their treatment at PWIs than at HBCUs (Hollingsworth et al., 2018). Similarly, several participants in this study reported differential treatment that may not only be a function of racial prejudice but gendered prejudice as well; for example, a Black female participant reported that her professor ignored her class contributions but praised the same points when they were made by White male students. Therefore, future research should investigate whether gender bias exacerbates the racial bias that this study demonstrated and that Black female students face in music doctoral programs.

**Summary**

In Chapter 5, I summarize the findings of this study and present answers to the research questions, as well as conclusions and recommendations for practice and future research. The conclusions and recommendations offered were based on the lived experiences and perceptions of students of color enrolled in music doctoral programs in PWIs in the U.S. South. The key

findings indicated that these students regularly experienced racial microaggressions and different treatment based on their race while their White colleagues neither recognized these microaggressions nor took them seriously. Still, participants reported that these microaggressions did not affect their commitment to persist towards graduation and the attainment of their doctoral degree.

Several findings emerged from this study that will benefit institutions of higher education in understanding how campus culture, particularly microaggressions commonly experienced in PWIs, affect African American students and students of color enrolled in doctoral programs. Doctoral educators, as well as campus administrators and policy makers, have a professional responsibility to understand how racism, discrimination, and microaggressions impact the experiences of students of color who pursue doctoral level education. With this understanding, they can hopefully improve the experiences of African American students in doctoral programs and begin to achieve racial equality, justice, and representation across academia.

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# APPENDIX A

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

My name is Jeffrey Hughley and I will be responsible for facilitating this semi-structured interview. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore African American music doctoral candidates' lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from people who operate and work at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in the U.S. South. As an African American student who has pursued a doctoral degree at a PWI, your views and insights will help attain this purpose. Between six to eight interviews will be conducted for the study. Each interview will last for approximately 45-60 min.

You were identified for participation from the Facebook group MBDNA. Initially, you were sent an email containing a recruitment document that included information about the research problem, the purpose of the study, the research methods, and the significance of the findings. After you showed interest in partaking in the study, you were sent an informed consent form through email, which provided information regarding your rights as participants, the expectations from you as participants, and the nature of the study. Your signing and returning the informed consent form indicated that you had read what was contained in the informed consent form and agreed to partake in the study voluntarily with the right to withdraw at any moment.

If you do not have any further queries on any aspect of the research process, we will start the interview.

1. What prompted you to attend a PWI as an African American music doctoral candidate?

2. What led you to choose the particular PWI that you attended as an African American music doctoral candidate?
3. What were your expectations regarding racial treatment at the PWI when you decided to attend it as an African American music doctoral candidate?
4. How would you describe the general environment at the PWI that you attended as an African American music doctoral candidate?
5. How would you describe the environment at the PWI that you attended for an African American student?
6. How would you define racism?
7. In your experience, how prevalent was racism from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors at the PWI that you attended as an African American music doctoral candidate?
8. In your experience, how prevalent was the phenomenon of racial microaggression from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors at the PWI that you attended as an African American music doctoral candidate?
9. How do you make sense of the racism and racial microaggression that you have experienced in your life in general?
10. How do you make sense of the racism and racial microaggression that you experienced from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors at the PWI that you attended as an African American music doctoral candidate?
11. Did your experience with racism and racial microaggression affect your wish to continue further education?

12. How do you conceptualize the phenomenon of white privilege in the context of your experience as an African American music doctoral candidate at a PWI?
13. How do you communicate the awareness of racial subordination at PWIs from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors with others to raise awareness?
14. In your experience, what kind of policies would have helped at the PWI for decreasing the potential negative consequences of racism and racial microaggression?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**
**CONSENT FORM**
**African-Americans with Doctoral Degrees in Music Form Predominantly White Institutions and their perception and Experience with Microaggressions and Racism**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

**Principal Investigator:** Name: Dr. Alison P. Farley
Department: Hugh Hodgson School of Music
Contact Information:
Email: apfarley@uga.edu
Phone: 706-542-3737

**Co-Investigator:** Name: Jeffrey D. Hughley
Department: Hugh Hodgson School of Music
Contact Information:
Email: JDH93013@uga.edu
Phone: 334-421-9065

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore African Americans with doctoral degrees in music lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from people who operate and work at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in the U.S. South.

Many African-Americans with Doctoral Degrees in Music from PWIs often faced microaggressions and racism from administrators, faculty, and academic advisors while working on their doctoral degrees.

The current study focuses on answering the following research questions:

1. How do African Americans music doctoral candidates at PWIs in the U.S. South describe their lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from the people who operate and work at their colleges or universities?
2. How do they describe their experiences of the phenomenon of racial microaggression from collegiate administrators, faculty, and academic advisors?

3. What are the contexts found within such situations as classes, meetings, and social functions where incidences of racial microaggression occur and that have affected African Americans with doctoral degrees in music?

African Americans with doctoral degrees in music lived experiences and perceptions regarding unequal and racist treatment from people who operate and work at PWIs in the U.S. South is being studied in this research.

You were selected to participate in this research study because you graduated from a PWI with a Doctoral degree in music within the last five years (2013-2018) and you can possibly be able to speak of current experiences of racial climate.

The qualitative data will be collected through face to face, or telephone 45- to 60-minute semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions will be asked. Between six to eight interviews will be conducted for the study. Each interview will be video, and audio recorded. The face-to-face interviews will be conducted in a public library within a private room, while virtual interviews will be conducted using the video communication application Skype.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- I will collect information about your lived experience.
- I will ask you to answer 14 questions. It will take about 45-60 minutes.
- I will follow up in 1months by email or phone call.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate will have no impact in your participation on job.

Some questions in this study deal with Microaggressions and Racism. There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them.

Your responses may help non-African Americans understand that microaggressions and racism is a major problem on the doctoral level.

If you participate in the interview by Skype, note that this research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

I will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, no personal information about the participants or their institutions will be published, and each participant will be assigned a pseudonym.

All data will be stored on my personal, password protected laptop and on a flash drive dedicated solely to data from this study. All digital and physical records from the data collected will be stored security for a period of five years, after which they will be permanently destroyed. The researcher will use a shredder to destroy the physical data and a software for data shredding to destroy the digital data. The information will not be used or distributed for future research.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Alison P. Farley at 706-542-3737, apfarley@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Name of Researcher | Signature | Date |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Participant | Signature | Date |

**Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.**

# APPENDIX C

## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Interview Transcriptions are available by request.