

**Out-of-class experiences of black and
marginalized students at traditionally white
higher education institutions:
A Literature study**

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1. Introduction

This literature study was commissioned by the CIRCoRe Student Lives/Communities workstream to provide insight into the out-of-class experiences of Black students/students of colour attending Traditionally White Higher Education Institutions (TWIs) and the oppression experienced in these spaces. Specific attention was given to how students' experiences of 'whiteness' and white spaces and mechanisms influenced students' sense of belonging and personal development at the campuses in question. The scope of this review does not allow for a focus on in-class experiences or academic experiences of Black students and will also not explore the wider concept of 'institutional culture.' The review focused on peer-reviewed articles published between 2013 and 2024.

Databases used included ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Sabinet African Journals, and Google Scholar. Search terms included 'out-of-class student experiences,' 'whiteness,' 'transformation,' 'racism,' 'higher education,' 'previously advantaged institutions,' 'traditionally white institutions,' 'student success,' and 'South Africa.'

The majority of peer-reviewed articles in this study applied Critical Race Theory (Alanis, Cunningham, & Brison, 2024; Çolak, 2024; Tichavakunda, 2022 & 2024; Von Robertson et al., 2014; Garrett, 2024) and Critical Whiteness Studies (Duran, Foste, Garcia, & Snipes, 2022; Evatt-Young & Bryson, 2021; Foste & Jones, 2020) as theoretical frameworks, while other authors used racial formation theory (Dizon, 2021), Plumwood's notion of dualism (Carolissen & Bozalek, 2016), Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence (Cornell, Ratele, & Kessi, 2016), feminist decolonial spatial theory (Flint, 2021), black feminist geography (Haynes, 2019), Anderson's theory of white space (Foste & Irwin, 2023), Intersectionality (Cornell, Ratele, & Kessi, 2016; Garrett, 2024), Du Bois' theory of double consciousness (Maseti, 2018), resistant capital (Morales, 2021), Schlossberg's transition theory (McCoy, 2014), Hartman's notion of the afterlife of slavery (Garibay & Mathis, 2021), critical epistemological perspective (Foste, 2021), and the theory of racialized emotions (Tichavakunda, 2021) as theoretical lenses.

Methodological approaches employed by authors were mostly qualitative, with a specific focus on interviews (Alanis, Cunningham & Brison, 2024; Morales, 2021; Tichavakunda, 2021; Von Robertson et al., 2014; Garrett, 2024), qualitative inquiries

(Carolissen & Bozalek, 2016; Evatt-Young & Bryson, 2021; Haynes, 2019). Other methodologies used were critical counternarrative methodology (Çolak, 2024; Tichavakunda, 2022; Masutha, Naidoo, & Enders, 2024), visual participatory action research methodology (Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Cornell, Ratele, & Kessi, 2016; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017), critical race methodology with a phenomenological approach (McCoy, 2014), spatial analysis (Duran, Foste, Garcia, & Snipes, 2022), feminist and decolonial methodological practice (Flint, 2021), autoethnography (Maseti, 2018), case study methodology (Foste, 2021; Foste & Irwin, 2023), critical constructivism (Dizon, 2021), and the ethnology of Black placemaking (Tichavakunda, 2024). Quantitative studies were in the minority, with Corno, La Ferrara & Burns (2022) using the implicit association test in their study, and Garibay & Mathis (2021) using a Critical Race quantitative inquiry.

2. Student experiences of oppression in white spaces

This literature study aims to explore the impact of whiteness at TWIs on the well-being of Black students and students of colour. Whiteness can be defined as "an ecology of hostile structures and practices that shape what we consider to be daily norms" (Garrett, 2024), favouring white interests while rendering people of colour as outsiders who must assimilate to the norms of whiteness to fit into and benefit from the institutional culture (Ahmed, 2024). The normalization of whiteness and its manifestation as everyday white supremacy is an ongoing societal challenge embedded in TWIs, impacting the very nature of the social fabric of these institutions, as well as the well-being and success of Black students (Evatt-Young et al., 2021; Bryson, 2017; Adonis & Silinda, 2021). A large body of work in higher education transformation research has thus been focusing on campus climate and the marginalized students' sense of belonging, academic success, and well-being (Hurtado et al., 2015; Stebleton et al., 2014; Budge et al., 2014; Koo, 2021; Shalka et al., 2022; Yao et al., 2021). It has furthermore been argued that higher education was, from its inception, a capitalist project of colonial imperialism built on wealth created by Black labour (Garibay & Mathis, 2021), always already driven by "the intersections of race, property, and oppression" (Patton, 2016: 317). The call for transformation in higher education hence needs to be continuously strengthened with extensive

research on whiteness, its manifestations, and its impact on Black students. Moreover, research should explore the tenacity of whiteness to effectively eradicate campuses from the far-reaching impacts of normalized whiteness as it plays out in daily practice (Foste & Jones, 2020). For transformation changes to become sustainable, "higher education leaders must address underlying systems and structures that, intentionally or not, maintain racism and racial inequity" (Evatt-Young et al., 2021: 48). In higher education research and practice, Black student experiences should hence be central in order to dismantle white domination and racialized oppression experienced by Black students (Çolak, 2024).

Consequently, the study will now turn to the experience of oppression in white spaces as experienced by Black students.

2.1 Debilitating experience of transformation as 'window dressing'.

Although TWIs in South Africa have been overtly and institutionally committed to racial, social, and curricular transformation, Black students are still experiencing a disconnect between transformation 'on paper' and in policy, and practical everyday transformation at grassroots levels. Students attending TWIs reported that these universities seemingly have their transformation policies in place and also seem to be committed to social justice and transformation on every institutional level, but that these commitments and policies do not translate to transformed practices, attitudes, and cultures on these campuses (Cornell & Kessi, 2017). It is interesting to note that reports colloquially known as the Khampepe Report (Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of Racism at Stellenbosch University, 2022) and the Soudien Report (2008) responded to social justice violations that took place in white male residences at TWIs, indicated that despite clear transformation agendas and policies, these endeavors are not reflected in the everyday experiences of staff and students of colour on these campuses.

This disconnection between transformation policies and the realities experienced by Black students on campus results in cognitive dissonance for new Black students. They experience a severe disconnect between official transformation policies and their lived experiences in these spaces (Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Flint, 2021). This divide between practice and policy might be a consequence of ignorance, where staff and

students do not understand the practical implementation of transformation policies or the lack of political will to implement transformation policies, in an attempt to keep the status quo (Cornell et al., 2016). Furthermore, where transformation policies were implemented, students reported that these policies still failed to address deeply embedded racialized attitudes and behaviours of staff and students, "failing to bring about change and transformation on an affective and interpersonal level" (Cornell et al., 2016: 98).

Regardless of the reasons for the disconnect between transformation policies and practice, the implications for working-class Black students are severe. It is becoming increasingly clear that the demographic transformation of TWIs is not enough to ensure students' success; without transformative initiatives bringing about change on an affective and interpersonal level, Black working-class students will fall through the cracks, impeding their chances of success and well-being at TWI campuses. Research has shown that institutions that claim the prioritization of diversity and transformation but that lack the substantive practices and policy implementation to support these claims merely result in a 'window dressing' exercise, creating false images of what students can expect once they arrive at university (Comeaux et al., 2020; Tichavakunda, 2020). Usually, students are overwhelmed by the whiteness of these spaces without guidance on how to navigate TWIs. Students claim universities are using transformation narratives as distractions, preventing deep institutional change from happening, leaving the 'real' transformation issues (read: financial inclusion, gender equality, food insecurity) untouched (Cornell & Kessi, 2017). Universities that do not actively take these experiences of students into account are running the risk of intentionally playing into these students' downfall, setting them up to fail while keeping a conservative status quo agenda in place:

"The implications of window-dressing are severe for Black working-class students and higher education as a whole. Window-dressing creates the illusion of institutions committed to equality and transformation whilst actively sabotaging the very aims of transformation policy in HE. In this case, window-dressing becomes a tool that facilitates an interest-convergence's subversive effect. For the subordinated working-classes, window-dressing by universities creates an impression of progress towards racial equality by admitting underprivileged students in numbers to meet government

quotas while maintaining an institutional environment that actively undermines their prospects of success and further subordinates them" (Masutha et al., 2024: 29-30).

Students furthermore criticize 'narrow' transformation agendas, focusing only on race, while leaving class, gender, sexuality, and disability out of the transformation equation. Garrett (2024) found that racialized female, neurodivergent PhD students were silenced when they shared the gender and ableist challenges they experienced at their institution, as they were told they should focus on their racialized challenges only. Garrett's study has also shown that female, racialized students were valued by the institution's management only for their racialized identity, used as 'poster children' for diversity, while not being valued as researchers academically. If the 'ideal' student attending TWIs is perceived as white, male, cisgender, and able-bodied, the institutional culture and dominant educational discourses will be informed by this notion of who the university should cater to. It is no surprise then that student success and well-being are massively impacted by these marginalized, racialized, and gendered students' lack of belonging at TWIs, as their experiences of transformation are reportedly associated with the perpetuation of alienation and exclusion (Cornell & Kessi, 2016), which results in a lack of access to social capital and institutional resources.

2.2 Stereotyping, micro-aggressions and internalized inferiority

Most studies on the experiences of Black students attending TWIs confirm the daily occurrence of racialized stereotyping, micro-aggressions, and stigmatization in these spaces, which negatively impact their student engagement and access to campus resources. Dizon (2021) found that institutional practices at TWIs discriminate against the Black bodies of students, rendering them second-class citizens whose movement becomes limited. Campus services such as campus security prohibit the freedom of movement of Black students, with a specific focus on Black males. Consequently, Black students are prevented from fully participating in their campus communities, with limited access to social and cultural capital. Resources at TWIs are hence still being distributed along racial lines, Dizon (2021) argues.

Cornell & Kessi (2017) furthermore indicated that the existence of different university entrance requirements for different racial categories resulted in Black students being stigmatized as academically disadvantaged and being "responsibilized" for declining academic standards. These stereotypes can hinder the well-being and success of Black students and might also explain why demographic transformation does not necessarily result in academic success and increased throughput rates of Black students. Cornell & Kessi (2017) aver that Black students carrying the brunt of these stigmatizations and stereotypes are blamed for transformation policies and (lack of) student success, while these institutions abdicate their responsibilities by not exploring the institutional reasons for Black students' academic struggles.

Maseti (2018) furthermore avers that Black stereotyping on TWIs renders the Black body as 'problematic' in white spaces, forcing Black students to enter a performative element of their racialized identities to prove they are 'worth' inhabiting white space. The external surveillance and policing associated with stigmatization and negative stereotyping become internalized by Black students, leading to feelings of unworthiness and attempts to gain recognition in white spaces. The internalization of stereotypes can be described as the process that enables the "external, sociohistorical reality to be assimilated into 'internal' and subjective reality" (Hook 2004, 101). Black students, moreover, tend to remove themselves from shared spaces as a way to escape the effects of negative stereotypes and the consequential internalization of these as meta-stereotypes.

Carolissen & Bozalek (2016) highlight the importance of challenging stereotypes, both on an institutional and interpersonal level. By tapping into students' perceptions, educators can disrupt dominant views and hegemonic discourses, working towards creating more inclusive learning and living environments for Black students. Students' narratives highlighted their dualistic thinking and normative assumptions about universities, their abilities as students of colour, and the impact of these on their career trajectories and future opportunities.

2.3 The cost of navigating white spaces.

Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) are spaces characterized by behaviours, attitudes, and mechanisms informed by a history of white supremacy. These white spaces are shaped by material and immaterial interactions, encounters, relations,

symbols, and affects, with far-reaching implications for students' success, sense of belonging, and outcomes (Flint, 2021; Foste & Irwin, 2023). Evatt-Young & Bryson (2021: 62) noted the "overwhelming presence of whiteness" on TWI campuses and the detrimental effect of white ways of knowing on Black students' adaptability and well-being. TWI spaces should hence not be understood as neutral 'backdrops' devoid of political or relational histories. Space should rather be analyzed as a valuable, albeit contested resource, and the racialized meanings and symbolics of white spaces, and its impact on Black students, should be dismantled (Duran et al., 2022).

The socio-spatial interactions in these spaces should be the focus of ethnographic and other studies, which need to grapple with how specific places welcome certain bodies while ostracizing and othering others (Haynes, 2019). Feminist geography perceives space as negotiated, relational, interactional, infused with difference, fluid, and shaped by its history as it played out in these spaces, and consequently race and gender are contested in organizations, characterized, and shaped by whiteness (Haynes, 2019; Duran et al., 2022). Flint (2021) emphasizes the importance of understanding TWI spaces as negotiated, relational, and contested, as we must dismantle the mechanisms of white spaces – how it was shaped, how it is maintained and perpetuated, and the detrimental effect on Black students' well-being, success, and development (Duran et al., 2022).

Cabrera et al. (2016) further aver that the way these spaces are shaped and structured by whiteness is, to a large extent, invisible for white students, whilst Black students are affected at almost every level of their lived experiences on these campuses (Foste & Jones, 2020). This level of white ignorance contributes to the perpetuation of white supremacy (Steyn, 2012), further burdening the Black student with navigating white spaces in their struggle to find spaces of belonging. Haynes (2019) similarly found that the emotional labour of navigating ignorant white spaces and its aggression force black female students out of residence halls, resulting in Black students not benefiting from the on-campus accommodation resources, whilst these departures ensure that white comfort zones are kept intact. Space at TWIs is thus inherently political (Duran et al., 2022). The dismantling of white space-making and its mechanisms – othering, stereotyping, micro-aggressions, and policing, to mention a few - should be prioritized by researchers and practitioners. Discussing the role space plays in student belonging and well-being is hence crucial (Duran et al., 2022).

2.4 Mechanisms of whiteness, and the impact on black students' sense of belonging

For the purposes of this literature review, research on Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) as white spaces of domination and oppression were prioritized. Several studies focused on white space and the general role it plays in structuring and maintaining inequality in TWIs (Duran et al., 2022; Flint, 2021; Foste & Jones, 2020), while others focused on white spaces as they manifest specifically in student housing at TWIs and the black student's lived experience of navigating white spaces, whiteness, oppression, and alienation in campus residence halls (Cornell et al., 2016; Foste & Irwin, 2023; Foste, 2021; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017). Several studies underscored the mechanisms of white spaces and the roles these play in perpetuating white supremacy, such as racial hostility, practices of othering, experiences of micro-aggressions, symbolic violence, stereotyping, social exclusion, and alienation that black students experienced in residence halls (Haynes, 2019; Duran et al., 2022).

Residence spaces and on-campus housing places are especially productive research sites because they function as microcosms, where the racialized and gendered dynamics of the larger campus play out in intimate and enclosed spaces. This aspect of residence spaces makes them opportune spaces to study racialization, whiteness, and oppression. Haynes (2019) asserts that it is imperative to study the socio-spatial relations and dynamics of residence halls, as these are the spaces where students seek refuge, a sense of belonging, and safety. These spaces are often also students' first experience of intercultural communal living, and where they negotiate and shape their identities based on gender, race, sexuality, and disabilities.

Consequently, Haynes (2019) conceptualizes the residence space, and specifically the shared room in residences, as such a contested, relational space. She interrogates the reason for female black students' self-segregation in multicultural residence halls and found that black female students' reason to self-segregate in residence halls was protective responses to over racialized hostility, micro-aggressions, negative race, and gender stereotypes, and their authority being undermined by white peers. Similarly, Duran et al. (2022) found that black students experienced alienation in white spaces, as their presence in these spaces was questioned, resulting in othering, alienation, and humiliation. Black students were made to feel unwelcome, as their ability to afford

placement in white spaces was questioned. White peers also insinuated that black students were not intelligent enough to live in white spaces, justifying black students' presence in these spaces as affirmative action placements. Whites thus perpetuated stereotypes of black students as poor, unintelligent, and non-deserving of spaces traditionally reserved for whites.

Duran et al. (2022) also shared the narratives of black students being policed by white peers; whites hence perpetuated the normativity of white spaces while making black students feel intentionally unwelcome and insufficient. Similarly, Haynes (2019) found that white students normalized white ways of being in multicultural residence halls, warning black peers that they should 'behave' appropriately should they want to continue living in these white spaces. This kind of boundary policing (Foste, 2021) taking place in campus housing impacts the worth, belonging, and value of black students in residential spaces and often results in practices of othering and ostracization. Black students reported that the struggle to see themselves represented in residential spaces and the constant surveillance by white peers make them feel 'perpetually homeless' (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017: 48).

These practices and mechanisms are the techniques used to keep white spaces white, comfortable for whites, and in whites in control, as white spaces are characterized by the absence of blackness. Black students are hence perceived as 'out of place' and forcefully socialized into adapting white ways of knowing and being. The mechanism of hyper-surveillance and control of black students are hence rife in white spaces, reminding black students of the provisional nature of their presence in white spaces (Foste & Irwin, 2023; Anderson, 2015).

Due to these mechanisms of whiteness - micro-aggressions, overt racial slurs, and stereotyping - black students experience residential racial climates differently from their white peers and often more negatively too (Foste & Irwin, 2023). White students reportedly experience TWIs as more welcoming than their black peers and have higher levels of satisfaction in their university experience (Flint, 2021). White residential spaces hence seem to favor the comfort and safety of white students, while the black student's experience of community, belonging, safety, and comfort is precarious, provisional, and fractured by racial slurs, white ignorance, and white comfort. Unfortunately, white students often do not recognize the different racialized

experiences of black and white students; white comfort, rather, is normalized, and a given, while their black peers' well-being, comfort, and safety should be earned.

Acknowledging the different experiences of belongingness in residential campus spaces along racialized and gendered lines is crucial for transformation initiatives, which force us to think of spatio-temporal relations as historical, negotiated, and fluid; how students develop a sense of belonging relates to the specificity of their history, racialized experiences, and the place and time they find themselves in on a given campus (Flint, 2021).

Consequently, symbols and artifacts on campuses play a defining role in creating or eradicating a sense of belonging for black students, as symbols of white supremacy might inflict symbolic violence on the racialized black body and psyche of students (Flint, 2021; Foste & Irwin, 2023; Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Cornell et al., 2016). Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence pertains to non-physical violence or "power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990: 4; Cornell et al., 2016). Cornell & Kessi (2016) conducted a study focusing on UCT students' engagement with and sense-making of symbols of oppression.

The removal of the Cecil John Rhodes memorial on the UCT Campus, identified as a symbol of colonial oppression, white privilege, and supremacy, led to the country-wide movement #rhodesmustfall, demanding the removal of colonial and apartheid era statues. Colonial symbols are problematic, as they are reminders of the internalized inferiority colonialism and whiteness embedded in the black psyche (Van der Wal, 2018; Coetzer, 2020). Black students attending TWIs are constantly subjected to colonial modes and symbols of subjectification as they move between and become with these symbols daily. These experiences impact their sense of belonging in white spaces and ultimately have an impact on student participation, accessing resources, and well-being (Cornell & Kessi, 2017). As Flint (2019: 570) puts it:

"...campus monuments demonstrate how imperative it is for us to move away from responding to belongingness as though it is a thing that all students can do in the same way, that belonging is something that happens in a neutral, static, and bounded space. Instead, belongingness is a doing that can ravel and unravel across the spacetime of the institution that is deeply connected to geometries of power."

Statues and artworks send strong messages regarding who and what are valued in a specific space and who belongs in that space. Similarly, several other campus symbols upholding the normativity of white, cisgender male students should be interrogated. Cornell et al. (2016) shared the stories of Black, female, LGBTQI+ working-class students' experiences of navigating gendered and racialized residence spaces at a TWI. Participants in this study claimed that the residence system, consisting mostly of male-only and female-only residences, subscribed to cisgender, heterosexual norms, rendering queer students as misfits subjected to abuse, not belonging to any of these spaces.

Queer students' basic needs, such as using gender-neutral bathrooms, were not prioritized by campus administration, forcing them to walk to designated bathrooms on the periphery of their spaces. These student experiences challenge the normativity of the 'ideal' student (read: cisgender, male, white, middle class), for whom campus experiences of belongingness are molded and are in line with calls for decolonization speaking to racial, gendered, and able-bodied norms. Students furthermore challenged the notion of 'university access', claiming that physical access does not ensure epistemic access and success (Cornell et al., 2016).

Dismantling white spaces and its mechanisms is hence crucial for the well-being and sense of belonging of black students, as these spaces have detrimental material and social consequences for students of colour. Navigating white racialized spaces comes at a huge emotional cost for black students; being confronted with constant policing, stereotyping, and having to face micro-aggressions daily takes its toll. Students shared that they suffer from racial battle fatigue and racial stress, having to keep up the emotional labour of navigating white spatial challenges. Being othered and stereotyped daily also leads to anger, frustration, sadness, and depression – racialized experiences and expectations that their white peers are not confronted with (Duran et al., 2022). Black students further reported that negative stereotyping in untransformed and racialized campus spaces robs them of having a student experience enjoyed by their white peers, as they will always be the racialized subject in the proverbial room.

Apart from the psychological and social damage caused by white racialized spaces, black students furthermore don't have access to the social and cultural capital inherently part of white spaces. If they want to 'fit in', they are expected to code-switch

or assimilate, hence adopting ways of being perceived of as 'more white'. They are consequently expected to constantly negotiate their identity, to barter for access to resources and spaces. While white students can enjoy spaces and take access to student accommodation for granted, black students are prevented from accessing these resources based on their racialized identities (Duran et al., 2022). By being pushed out from white spaces by the mechanisms of whiteness – black stereotyping, microaggressions, and othering – black students fail to access campus resources that should contribute to their future success.

3. Responses to oppression in white spaces

Acknowledging the overwhelming presence of racism and whiteness present at TWIs (Evatt-Young & Bryson, 2021), several studies confirmed that student resistance and responses to oppression resulted, and can result, in changes for black students on these campuses (Cornell et al., 2016; Foste & Irwin, 2023; Duran et al., 2022; Haynes, 2019; Flint, 2021).

3.1 Counter-spaces

The availability of counter-spaces, where the deficit notion of students of colour can be challenged, mobilization for resistance against white oppression can be launched, and community building can take place, is crucial for black student belonging, engagement, and success. Counter-spaces are social, physical, or digital places created by marginalized students, where they can build relationships, foster a sense of belonging, and cultivate a community free of micro-aggressions and racism, thus experiencing a healthy racial campus climate. Counter-spaces manifest as social areas in public campus spaces, campus residences, societies focused on social justice, or multicultural student organizations. These spaces, where blackness is celebrated, are instrumental in assisting black students in navigating white spaces and TWIs, particularly aiding in the adaptation, acclimatization, and adjustment to university life, and fostering social and academic success, especially among marginalized first-year students, who may feel overwhelmed by the prevailing whiteness, classism, and gender normativity at TWIs. It is important to note that counter-spaces can provide black students with access to university campus resources, social and cultural capital, through mentors who can offer guidance on navigating TWIs. Research has shown that institutional support for counter-spaces

sends important symbolic messages to students about who is valued and underscores the university management's efforts to ensure marginalized students feel welcome on a TWI campus. The absence of these spaces and extracurricular activities where marginalized students can engage with others who share their struggles have a detrimental effect on student well-being and success (Alanis et al., 2024; Von Robertson et al., 2014; McCoy, 2014; Morales, 2021; Tichavakunda, 2021; Çolak, 2024).

Counter-spaces are furthermore productive and creative environments where students can share experiences and resistant capital. Resistant capital refers to the mechanisms, tools, and techniques students can employ to resist microaggressions, build networks to access campus resources, and share social strategies to navigate whiteness. Having spaces for black students to vent and share frustrations, as well as to receive validation of their racialized experiences, is also important. Examples of resistant capital include counter-narratives/stories, 'beasting', and black placemaking practices (Morales, 2021). Black and marginalized students' participation in counter-spaces is imperative for a higher retention rate, as it creates a sense of belonging, a home away from home, and promotes well-being (Von Robertson, 2014).

3.2 Counternarratives

A study by Çolak (2024) further explored how counter-spaces serve as geographical and physical spaces where counternarratives are created as a form of resistant capital. Counternarratives, embedded in critical knowledge, the agency of marginalized students, and advocacy, are mechanisms students use to resist the racialized dehumanization of white spaces. By creating and sharing counter-stories that negate and devalue the persistent societal discourse and practices around Blackness, students use their voices and agency to deliberately challenge oppression (Çolak, 2024; McCoy, 2014).

Çolak's study focused on how marginalized students resist racialized othering while attending a TWI by capitalizing on community cultural wealth, networks, and prior skills and knowledge. The research has shown that marginalized students can better navigate their racialized belongings through using counternarratives as resistant capital. Çolak furthermore highlighted the value of marginalized ways of knowing as a resource to develop ways of resisting their racialized interactions on campus, i.e., the

epistemic wealth these students are endowed with amidst the challenges of navigating white spaces on TWIs. Similarly, Cornell & Kessi have shown that “young people from nondominant backgrounds are not passive recipients of discriminatory ideologies, norms, and practices as they draw on their agentic capacity to cope with, resist, or disrupt them” (Cornell & Kessi, 2017).

In a similar vein, Morales (2021) avers that ‘beasting’ empowers black students to respond to micro-aggressions in a culturally affirming way, lessening the burden of educating whites about racism. Beasting, a form of resistant capital and counter-storytelling, is the use of facts to dismiss white ignorance and racialized beliefs:

“Beasting is if you and I were to get into a debate and then you beasted me, that means you put out everything you have to say to me and I cannot say anything more . . . It’s kind of like I have to defend myself. I just feel like I have to because I’m not going to let somebody say something about my particular race and just let it slide” (Morales, 2021: 75).

Beasting can manifest as the intellectual assertion of blackness, the centering of black history, culture, and perspectives, and by affirming black diversity and heterogeneity (Morales, 2021). Tichavakunda’s (2022) study explored how the centering of Black history can contribute to minimizing the effect of majoritarian narratives at TWIs. His study explored counter-narration at a TWI named after a former slaveowner. The narratives empower students to center black history and black contributions to economic well-being, while ‘mocking’ or ridiculing the dominant institutional narratives.

A study by Masutha et al. (2024) furthermore indicated how counter-storytelling can challenge majoritarian black deficit narratives dominating TWIs by employing the counter-stories of financial aid-funded Black working-class students. The study highlighted the mechanisms and techniques used by TWIs to blame victims for non-completion, rather than to accept complicity and address institutional racism, for non-completion of students. By highlighting the counter-stories and lived experiences of black students, the study confirmed “how the micro-level lived realities of the marginalized in their journeys of extreme social mobility through HE relates to broader social contexts and power relations” (Masutha et al., 2024: 32).

Counter-narratives are thus a critical race method that affirms and validates racialized ways of being and knowing in white spaces, framing the stories and lived experiences

of these students as ontological and epistemological fundamentals (Doharty et al., 2020), i.e., racialized lived experiences as valid knowledge that should be treated as such in designing and implementing transformation initiatives in TWIs.

3.3 Black placemaking and black joy

The importance of black placemaking as a mechanism to ensure and maintain a sense (and places) of belonging on TWIs for black students is highlighted by Tichavakunda (2024). By engaging “the intersections of Blackness, place, structure, and agency”, and without disregarding the hard realities of oppression and the persistence of whiteness, Tichavakunda argues that black placemaking can serve as a useful analytical tool for understanding and interpreting thoroughly black student experiences while focusing on their agency. Furthermore, black placemaking can be used as a supplementary concept to counter-spaces to understand how black spaces are created, maintained, and supported, moving beyond resistance to the maintenance of such spaces and the daily lives and interactions of black students. This framework can also contribute towards centering blackness rather than whiteness by studying how oppressive places are turned into celebratory places.

A black placemaking analysis hence recognizes black spaces on TWIs as self-motivated, vibrant spaces, while also acknowledging and exploring the labour of students who create and sustain these spaces of belonging. The way in which black spaces are co-created and designed to meet the needs and desires of students is studied, while attention is also given to the interrelations, dynamics, structures, practices, and politics required to maintain black spaces. Tichavakunda (2024) furthermore found that black placemaking highlights the diversity within blackness and other marginalized identities while focusing on the creative, dynamic, and authentic ways black students exercise their agency. This approach hence highlights the ways black students create meaningful lives and spaces of belonging on TWIs despite, and perhaps because of, the oppression and structural constraints they face:

“Black life on campus, after all, is more than resistance to racism, more than protests, more than coping with tokenism, and more than the structural position of Blackness. Despite the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992), Black life is also house parties, grabbing lunch with friends, and studying all-night during finals. By only focusing on the negative, racialized experiences of Black students, we inadvertently make

students one-dimensional. To better understand the totality of Black student life, from the protests to the step-shows, from the microaggressions to the Black parties, and from the fantastic to the mundane, scholars must make use of a variety of frameworks” (Tichavakunda, 2024: 110).

Black placemaking can furthermore assist in creating and sustaining campus spaces where black students can intentionally create positive experiences. Similarly, this approach can assist in detecting campus structures that work against joyous black experiences. By focusing on black joy at TWIs and the creation and perpetuation of black joy in black spaces, Tichavakunda (2021; 2024) insists that more attention should be given to the linkage between black joy and positive student experiences. He argues that the concept of joy is integral to a sense of belonging, student engagement, student wellbeing and success, and the wider racial climate on TWI campuses. Tichavakunda encourages student affairs practitioners and academics to ask: where are the black places of belonging, joy, community, and wellbeing? And how are these created, perpetuated, and sustained? Although student organizations play a vital role in black student wellbeing and adaption to TWIs, Tichavakunda avers that TWIs should prioritize the institutional support for black placemaking as holders of black joy, taking place in the form of parties, graduations, and other celebratory events.

Foste & Irwin (2023) confirmed that a black placemaking and black joy approach can empower black students to reclaim space, create and strengthen community ties, and maintain a sense of belonging in student housing contexts, despite the prevalence of white dominance at TWIs. By using creative and recreational ways of community building, black students can enlarge and perpetuate space that provides a sense of belonging, which in turn will contribute to student engagement, success, retention, and wellbeing.

4. Recommendations for Higher Education practitioners and researchers

Given the prevalence of whiteness and its impact on TWI campuses, Foste & Jones (2020) recommend that whiteness should be dismantled and mapped as it occurs in everyday experiences on campus. The racial identity development of whites should be studied with a Critical Whiteness Studies lens. Foste & Jones (2020) identified three developmental stages of white identity construction and awareness: ignorant construction of whiteness, emergent construction of whiteness, and critical

construction of whiteness. These developmental stages can be used as guidance to design diversity workshops to actively combat racism, as research has shown that diversity and inclusion training can help to reduce racist behaviours on TWIs. It is important to mention that these workshops or interventions should be designed to ensure white students understand the systemic nature of racism as a historical, spatial, economic problem. Too often racism is depicted, understood, and taught as an individual characteristic, which is a consequence of willful, epistemic ignorance (also called white ignorance) about the relational and systemic nature of racism (Steyn, 2012; Mills, 1997). Workshops should aim to bring the cost of racism home – racism benefits whites, and because it's inherently relational, black students are negatively affected. The same holds for gender binaries, economic disparities, and other forms of discrimination, where the privileged have their benefits, at a direct cost to the unprivileged or discriminated.

The vexed pedagogical question remains: how do educators work with, and against, willful ignorance, without losing the student in this learning process? The veil of racial ignorance is kept intact if white students are socially and institutionally protected against the consequences and impacts of racial behaviours – consequences for both them and their black peers (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017). Research has shown that white students perceive themselves as tolerant if their habitual white ways of knowing and doing are not educationally disrupted. More research is needed on white students and arrested racial development, which occurs as a result of insulated social circles and networks, and the lack of course material confronting racism (Foste & Jones, 2020). Similarly, an emotional and affective understanding of whiteness should be encouraged, rather than focusing merely on cognitive and rational sense-making. Not much literature focuses on how white people feel about racism, and racial theories focus on cognitive framings to analyse racism. Asking how someone 'thinks' about racism, versus how the person might 'feel' about it, is quite an important distinction. This false affect/cognition dichotomy should be dismantled, as humans are not solely rational beings, whose actions are quite often driven by affects and emotions. Racial ideologies and white supremacy might be better understood and more successfully disrupted by using affective theoretical lenses (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017; Dick, 2017).

Van der Riet & Verwoerd's (2022) work on 'white work' can also be useful to dismantle whiteness at TWIs. This work among white people focusing on the legacy of apartheid takes on a three-dimensional form - raising consciousness, cultivating capacity, and forming community – that can be used as a theory of change to diagnose efforts of dismantling whiteness, while also assisting practitioners to carefully craft diversity and inclusion workshops with deep and lasting impact.

Furthermore, given the dominance of whiteness at TWIs, staff development opportunities for white staff members, where these workshops focus on self-reflexivity by using experiential learning programs, should be prioritized. Experiential learning and lifelong learning are crucial elements in this regard, as we need to move beyond the cerebral, rational, and cognitive, towards the embodied and affective nature of systemic racism and its impacts. White staff need to be provided with the opportunity “to realize their own complicity in perpetuating spaces of whiteness, whether intentional or unintentional” (Duran et al, 2022). Workshops and practices should, however, not stop at reflection but must actively dismantle white spaces, with the aim to empower white educators to intentionally create inclusive spaces. Duran mentions that this ‘unlearning’ and dismantling of whiteness are an ongoing process, and not just a checkbox exercise that staff do once and then it’s done. This is the deep work and lifelong learning that rightly not only students but also staff members should engage in.

It is important to mention that both lecturing staff and PASS staff should receive these self-reflexive whiteness workshops, as both groupings work with students daily. PASS staff can also be defined as educators, as they transfer knowledge daily to students about the inner workings and dynamics of the institutional machine. Students learn by observing staff interactions, and they learn and repeat these behaviours modelled to them by all staff members (Duran et al, 2022).

Literature on the out-of-class experiences of black students studying at TWIs furthermore makes a strong argument for the employment of a critical spatial analysis lens to study whiteness, white spaces, and white dominance, to understand the interrelatedness of space, materiality, and racialization. Critical spatial analysis will enable researchers and practitioners to understand how white spaces are created and maintained via symbols, artifacts, racialized behaviours, racialized encounters, race

habits, and aesthetics, while also giving insight into the experiences of black students who must navigate these spaces. The impact of these white spaces on black students should also be a focal point of further research, with the aim of such research endeavours to disrupt white spaces as they manifest as exclusive and alienating. The historical dimension of the construction of white spaces and their maintenance should also be researched, theorized, and used to influence the practices of student affairs practitioners (Duran et al, 2022).

Ethnographic methods are also useful to explore and share experiences of othering in white spaces. Visual methods combined with ethnographies can be incredibly useful to identify and communicate the visual cues and aesthetics of a space that make black students feel unwelcome. Auditory methods can also aid in this regard - how can sounds at a TWI make you feel lonely, othered, or alienated? Multiple and creative forms of data collection are important to aid in constructing the complex and affective nature of racialized spaces (Duran et al, 2022; Samura, 2016; Brunsma et al, 2020).

Flint (2021) similarly avers that a campus culture consisting of colonial symbols has a detrimental effect on the sense of belonging of black students, as these symbols of oppression carry affective connotations for black students. She further argues that for this reason, belonging is not a neutral concept that can be applied to students irrespective of their race and background; belongingness is “rather a historically situated and hegemonic concept that is always in relation to space and time” (Flint, 2021: 562), and hence the symbols and material artifacts present in these spaces. Institutions that claim that they are transformative should hence take the symbols and statues present in spaces seriously if they claim that they value a sense of belonging for black students. An institution that values black students and their wellbeing would ensure that the university is not only academically accessible for them but also institutionally, administratively, culturally, and socially. These forms of access can prevent or enable student engagement, belonging, success, and most importantly, access to resources for black students (Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Masutha, 2024).

It is furthermore recommended that a critical spatial analysis should also be used to explore the racialized dynamics in the microsocial spaces on TWIs, especially in the shared rooms of on-campus student residences. This will support quantitative research indicating that interracial room sharing does contribute to the breakdown of

racialized stereotypes and the wellbeing of both black and white students (Corno et al, 2022). Although residence placement policies do require that students are allocated to residences by random allocation to ensure multicultural room sharing, there is still a racialized element present when residence managers and student leaders responsible for roommate placements do these allocations at the beginning of each academic year.

The recommendation of interracial roommate placements by random allocation has been mentioned by Soudien (2008) in the report written in response to the UFS Reitz-incident. The problem with recommendations of this nature is that even if it gets included in policy, implementation at mid-manager level and administrative level still hinders the process. Stronger institutional support is needed for interracial roommate placements to be intentionally and successfully implemented.

Running concurrently with randomized placements, workshops should be facilitated in student communities, both for on-campus students as well as commuter students, that directly challenge stereotypical thinking. Workshops and interventions challenging racialized stereotypes should be intentional and deliberate about the power relations and power imbalances between marginalized and privileged students, and how the benefits of the privileged are directly related to the lack of resources and opportunities for the marginalized. A pedagogy of discomfort should hence be employed, challenging the comfort zones of white spaces, on a macrosocial and microsocial level, and the implication of this for black students (Carolissen & Bozalek, 2016).

Student affairs practitioners, educators, and academics are moreover encouraged to explore the importance of counter-spaces as resistant capital, black placemaking, and black joy on TWI campuses. Institutional support for black spaces of belonging and engagement is crucial to ensure that black students find spaces of belonging, where they can excel, socialize, and tap into the resources of the institution (Tichavakunda, 2021; 2024). It is also crucial for academic and PASS staff to share social spaces with a diverse body of students so that they can understand the lived experiences of black students on TWIs. Engaging with students in these spaces will form part of a transformative staff experience, where staff can observe and engage with students in a relaxed and social environment (Cunningham & Brison, 2024). Because how do you

serve and guide students if you don't understand who they are, where they are coming from, and how they think about life and learning?

Black counter-spaces and black place-making can provide spaces where students can share their lived experiences not only with one another but with black staff members too. Çolak (2024), Moffit et al (2020), Morales (2021), and Cornell & Kessi (2017) argue that it's crucial to acknowledge the presence and impact of racism, and should be supplemented with in-depth analysis of how marginalized groups 'make sense of, process, and resist being labelled as a racialized other' (Çolak, 2024: 3). Spaces of belonging for black students should also provide access to black peer mentors, guidance from senior students, and guidance from black staff on how to navigate TWIs and should encourage actions of resistance that transcends victimhood (Cunningham & Brison, 2024). Practices like beasting, the creation of counter-spaces, and counter-narratives as resistant capital to challenge white dominance should be encouraged. This highlights the notion that young, marginalized students are not passive victims, but that they rather draw on their agentic capacity to cope, resist, and disrupt whiteness. Beasting, for example, focuses on capacitating the black student, rather than to focus on the white offender (Morales, 2021). Black intellectual capital and black contributions to economic well-being can be asserted by responding to micro-aggressions in a way that centres Black history, culture, and perspectives, while the affirmation of diversity in Black communities can also contribute to asserting Black intellect (Morales, 2021). These forms of resistant capital and empowerment mechanisms are shared in counter-spaces, by black placemaking practices (Tichavakunda, 2024).

It is also important to mention that if an institution is serious about creating a sense of belonging for marginalized black students, said institution would work hard at the retention of black academic staff members and black PASS staff members. Representation is crucial for black students to belong and to excel. Employment of black staff alone is hence not enough; black staff should feel comfortable and welcome on TWIs to ensure that they can guide and educate a diverse student body towards inclusivity and acceptance (Baksh, 2024).

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the study indicated that we have to critically rethink student access – what does it mean to have academic access, but not social,

cultural, or institutional access. Critically rethinking student access implies we have to reconsider public policy and the notion of the university as a common institution. Narrative methodologies of policy analysis, implementation, or the lack thereof will also provide insight into experiences of exclusion, alienation, and the perpetuation of inequality (Masutha et al, 2024).

In the spirit of black student success, institutional research should focus on the narratives and lived experiences of change-agents who identified cracks in the system of white dominance, leveraging these margins of manoeuvrability to challenge dominant reproductive practices of whiteness. In this way, research will provide insight and guidance into the mechanisms and structures of oppressive systems and how individuals can work together to bring about change. Masutha et al (2024) conclude that the narratives and lived experiences of black success and black innovation should be the focus of researchers and practitioners committed to higher education transformation at TWIs:

“Finally, we believe that stories of success, of Black-working-class graduates succeeding against all odds, would be of academic and practical value. Such research could further illuminate the often overlooked resourceful and transformative side of Black-working-class students, in their journeys to and through higher education, what they bring to and find in universities enabling them to endure in often hostile places in need of agents of change” (Masutha et al, 2024: 34).

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