UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Revealing and Uprooting Cellular Violence: Black Men and the Biopsychosocial Impact of

Racial Microaggressions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Kenjus Terrel Watson

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Revealing and Uprooting Cellular Violence: Black Men and the Biopsychosocial Impact of

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Professor Daniel Solórzano, Chair

Although the overall health in the US has improved over the past few decades, Black men,

regardless of socioeconomic status or educational attainment, bear a disproportionate

burden in disease morbidity and mortality[1]. African-American men remain the most

vulnerable racial gender group for almost every health condition that medical researchers

monitor and feature the lowest life expectancy of any cohort in the country[2]. Current

research[3] suggests college-educated African-Americans accumulate stress through frequent

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[1] Mays, V. M., Cochran, S. D., & Barnes, N. W. (2007). Race, race-based discrimination, and health outcomes among African Americans. *Annual Rev. Psychol.*, *58*, 201-225

[2] Ibid.

[3] Harper, S. R., & Davis, C. H. F. III (2012). They (don't) care about education: A counter narrative on Black male students' responses to inequitable schooling. *Educational Foundations, 26*(1), 103-120

encounters with subtle and seemingly ambiguous forms of racial discrimination. These

racial microaggressions (a particularly mundane and insidious form of modern racism)

can wreak havoc on the psychological and physiological functioning of Black males and

may be complicit in their elevated levels of stress-related disease and shortened lifespans.

Most educational research on Black males' racialized experiences at purposively white

colleges and universities (PWIs) has featured qualitative, self-report measures of

psychological health. Educational researchers know far less about potential long-term

physiological and physical health outcomes associated with racial microaggressions.

My dissertation, *Revealing Cuts Beneath the Skin: Black Collegiate Men and the

Biopsychosocial Impact of Racial Microaggressions,* examines the effect of racial

microaggressions on indicators of early biologic dysregulation among Black male collegians.

Guided by the tenets of Critical Race Theory in Education, I utilized a Transformative

Sequential Mixed Method to collect biostatiscal (saliva sample), quantitative

(microaggression survey), and qualitative (focus group) data to more reliably investigate the

relationship between Black collegiate males' recognized experiences with and responses to

"everyday racial invalidations" on PWIs *and* their relative telomere[4] length; a biometric of

stress-related (vs. chronological) aging.

Analysis of the survey data revealed that nearly all of the men report some form of

stress-related ailment (such as tension headaches, stomach pain, and difficulty sleeping).

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[4] Telomeres are nucleotide sequences at the ends of human chromosomes that protect genetic material deterioration and recombination. They deteriorate and become shorter with each cellular division over time until they eventually signal that the cells they are tasked with protecting are aging, approaching "death", and may no longer be able to divide. While telomere shortening is a natural consequence of aging, it can also occur as a result of prolonged exposure to various forms of stress, including everyday racial discrimination. Epel, E. S., Blackburn, E. H., Lin, J., Dhabhar, F. S., Adler, N. E., Morrow, J. D., & Cawthon, R. M. (2004). Accelerated telomere shortening in response to life stress. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *101*(49), 17312-17315.

Additionally, the majority of participants anticipate that they will endure daily

discrimination and prepare for the potential of negative interactions prior to leaving

their living spaces each day. However, when considering survey responses in relation to

participant telomere lengths, a far higher proportion (85-100%) of individuals with longer

telomeres *recognized* enduring everyday discrimination across various campus spaces and

attributed these negative experiences to racism compared to individuals with shorter

telomere (less than 46%).

This mixed method study suggests that Black students on PWIs are besieged by daily

encounters with antiblack racism. The findings also speak to the importance of Derrick Bell's

concept of racial permanence and Chester Pierce's (the person who coined the term racial

microaggression) contention that Black people must be prepared to recognize and navigate a

racialized climate that is inherently noxious to their existence. Moreover, it appears that the

unnaturally shortened lifespans of Black men marked by the social embodiment of racism

commence earlier than was previously imagined. The current findings affirm the

interdisciplinary work of scholars investigating the impact of racism across various levels of

societal interaction in Public Health, Social Epidemiology, and Psychology and help extend

their observations to the field of Education.

The dissertation of Kenjus Terrel Watson is approved.

Walter Allen

Tyrone Howard

Shaun Harper

Leticia Marquez-Magana

David O. Stovall

Daniel G. Solórzano, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

I dedicate this dissertation to my Ancestors, Family, and Loved Ones.
Thank you for helping me re-member Ubuntu.

Table of Contents

viii

Tables

Figures

Acknowledgements

I feel as though I have been writing this dissertation, in one way or another, from the time I was expelled from Bethel Christian School in Riverside, CA as a 6-year-old for hitting my principal's leg in protestation of his attempt to dole out undeserving corporal punishment. I developed an intuitive understanding of Critical Race Theory each morning in my kindergarten class as my teacher preemptively situated my "behavior card" to "yellow," as a visible warning that I was one step, one word, one shift in my seat away from being jettisoned to that very same principal for additional correction. My propensity to notice the subtleties and nuances of racism has been influenced by the times my hair was compared to bb gun pellets, my sisters were kicked out of pools, my teachers accused me of cheating, or a loved one's father lauded the fact that he had not yet called me Nigger. I gained a deeper understanding of antiblackness when the nonblack people closest to me did not want to believe I was being disproportionately harassed by the police because they didn't want to believe the world could be that bad. I understood the necessity for a study on the impact of everyday racial violence every time my dad and mom were pulled over; or the time when my family was denied seating at a Waffle house in Arkansas; and especially when my mother called 911 hoping to help my 9-year-old, baby sister who was having severe stomach pains and the emergency operator refused to rule out that she maybe pregnant. I envisioned a way to better understand the harm of racism when my uncle purposively sought sanctuary in a remote gas station to avoid being physically assaulted by the caravan of people following him and calling him a faggot. This dissertation comes from each and every time I've witnessed Black people attempt to self-soothe, by any means necessary, in order to cope with the violence this place is predicated on. And it comes from each time we have been psychologically flayed in order to stabilize and justify other people's internal compasses of inaction, disdain, spectacular and mundane negrophilias and negrophobias. This study comes from traveling to Ferguson in the wake of Mike Brown's murder; And from the years I spent witnessing videos of Black people being harassed and murdered in hopes the evidence would eventually tilt the outcomes towards justice. The study emerges from these and thousands more personal lived experiences. To put it shortly, this dissertation exists *because* the world is toxic to Black people. And I am writing against the poison that remains palpable and harmful in our lives. I would thus like to first acknowledge the dispersed Africans (known and unknown) who continue to endure daily anti-lifeness and have provided, in actual blood, the inspiration for this current labor. I am angered and dismayed by the generations of our ongoing and intimate suffering. I promise to aim my wake work against these disasters, precarity, and calamities, and to attune my root work; my re-membering (what some call research) towards our Sankofa (our return to Source).

I would not have been able to navigate this terrain were it not for a grounded relation with the Creator, the Orishas (Yemeya, Oshun, Shango, Elegua, etc), and the Ancestors (in particular Uncle Derrick Burkes), who have always offered pathways to re-member the necessary perspective, strength, balance and àṣẹ to accomplish this work. As a reflection of this connection I am also eternally grateful to Dr. Danielle Marie Dupuy, mother of our seed, my soul partner and the most powerful, brilliant, loving, and wondrous conscious collective of sacred earth, water, air, and fire – an entire universe unto herself; with whom I am blessed to learn, grow, and move with on this journey. I am appreciative also of Ayaan Lara Watson, our Gift from God, who provided true inspiration to patiently and persistently listen to the Black body and share the urgent wisdom gained without hesitation. I cannot wait to learn with and from you

Kenjus T. Watson

Division of Social Science and Comparative Education
Graduate School of Education & Information Studies
University of California, Los Angeles
3101A Moore Hall, P.O. Box 951521 405 Hilgard Avenue
(951) 660-6879 kenjus.watson@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Expected 2019   Doctoral Candidate in Education with a specialization in Race and Ethnic Studies
University of California, Los Angeles

"Revealing Cuts Beneath the Skin: Black Collegiate Men and the
 Biopsychosocial Violence of AntiBlack Microaggressions"

Dissertation Chair: Daniel G. Solórzano
Dissertation Committee: Tyrone C. Howard, David O. Stovall, Walter Allen,
Shaun Harper, Leticia Marquez-Magana

Expected Filing Date: June 14, 2019

2009   Masters in Education College Student Affairs and Higher Education
The Pennsylvania State University

2007   Bachelors of Arts in Psychology
Occidental College

PUBLICATIONS

Watson, K.T. (2019) Implicit Bias and Microaggressions: Distinguishing the intent and impact of everyday racism. In T. Howard (Ed.), *All students must thrive: Transforming schools to combat toxic stressors and cultivate social-emotional well-being*

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AWARDS AND HONORS

2015-2016 Faculty of the Year Award, Black Student Alliance, Occidental College

2015-2016 Dissertation Year Fellowship, University of California, Los Angeles

2014-2015 Graduate Research Mentorship Award, University of California, Los Angeles

2014   Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Award, University of California, Los Angeles

2013   Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Award, University of California, Los Angeles

2012-2013 Graduate Education Fellowship, University of California, Los Angeles

2008-2009 Bunton-Waller Graduate Fellowship, The Pennsylvania State University

2007-2008 Bunton-Waller Graduate Fellowship, The Pennsylvania State University

2006-2007 Irwin Mahler Psychology Award for Scholarship and Justice, Occidental College

Prologue

What Dungeon: Letter to My Nephew on the Occasion of Zimmerman's Acquittal
June 14th, 2013

Dear Kaleb,

We've talked numerous times about revolutionaries…about those women and men in oppressed communities who fought with their every breath to help free their people. When you ask me what I do for a living, I've told you that I am a teacher and a writer. I think I've told you that one of the people I've looked to for inspiration is the Black revolutionary author and activist James Baldwin.

Back in 1962, Baldwin wrote his nephew an important letter for his birthday. And given that today, July 14th 2013 is your special day, I thought I would try to write you a letter too. I'm giving this to you, along with your Nintendo 3DS game, because I love you and I want you to always have a good idea of what happened as you reached your first decade of life. I'm going to use some big words and big ideas. And some of them may not make sense right away. But I promise you they will someday.

On this occasion, your 10th birthday, I find myself in a position to offer a few words that I hope you will one day find helpful as you progress ever so effortlessly and rapidly towards your formative years.

Today has arrived much sooner than I imagined it would. Ten years ago, your mother flew with you from Nebraska to California some 6 weeks after you were born. Your parents brought you into our home and our world has never been the same.

As a principle player on our familial stage, you know all too well that we rarely accomplish much in a quiet manner. We met you on a reliably typical day. Dogs barked. A few dishes shattered. Music, dancing, and criticism ensued. Your aunts, mother, Ya-Ya, and I argued passionately about nothing; taking turns holding, hugging, and kissing you. We marveled in the wonder of a new and warm addition to our tribe. Your presence on this earth and in our home seemed so immediate and so surreal. You were one of us. You were with us. And we loved you unconditionally.

I am not sure of the full range of emotions your mom, Ya-Ya, Aunt Chandra, or Aunt Kerry endured given your arrival into this world. I do know that I experienced a rather confusing combination of euphoric hope and deeply immobilizing fear. I was hopeful about your inherent and apparent beauty and genius. You inspired me and I longed to do all I could to support your endless possibility and potential. Kaleb Michael Cabbell. My nephew. My unrivaled pride and joy. I had confidence that you would be able to accomplish anything you so desired and my heart swelled with restless excitement about bearing witness to your many successes throughout life.

Unfortunately, this positive perspective was tempered by the terrifying feeling of the unfair burden you will undoubtedly carry. And let me be clear and frank about why you'll face unreasonable challenges; and that is, my dear nephew, the fact that you are a Black man living in a white supremacist society that hates Black men. I cannot mince words or speak with cautioned optimism as I disclose this to you. Being a Black man is not a safe thing to be nor a forgiving space to occupy in our country. But it is, undoubtedly, what and where you are, as well as what and where you will be for the remainder of your life.

Forgive my rudimentary remarks. You are, after all, a bright, expressive, and self-aware young man, fully capable of deducing the more nuanced aspects of lived reality (I'm thinking of your incessant desire as a young boy to crawl on floors and walls as if you were Spiderman). However, I would be remiss were I to take for granted any young African-American's ability to come to terms with this existential truth. I certainly struggled to do so. And, to be honest, I continue to wrestle with the everyday challenges that accompany Black life in America.

Knowing this Kaleb, I understood that the very heights I hoped you might reach would be thwarted by white supremacy and the accompanying discourse that Black men (and all People of Color) are less than human and thus deserving of inhumane treatment.

Looking at your small body on that day, I had nightmares of how large you would grow and the potentially grave consequences of your first spurt. I cried quietly to myself, thinking of how insane and broken our world truly is.

You, an innocent child in my arms, would eventually (through no fault of your own) come to represent the epitome of white psychosis and anxiety. Recalling my own unwarranted encounters with gun-touting police officers and nervous white motorist, I cursed the day when you would have to navigate our toxic environment.

So I held you on that hot summer day in Moreno Valley. I held you and I held these hope and fears all at once; hoping to stem the tide of oncoming assaults to your character, integrity, and humanity by pulling you closer to my heart.

I want to let you know that I never stopped trying to hold you in that place where you maintain your dignity and bright future, unbridled by the reality of racism and oppression in the US I have done this even when we're not close to each other.

I think about how your dad has not yet turned out to be all that we had hoped he might be. I hold you, knowing that the same is true of my own father. The same is also true of me.

I hold you knowing that, at times, you've been more hungry and colder than young children should be; that your shoes have had more holes than they should have. I know that Santa has promised make-up presents before. And I know that you've foregone many of the small things that seem just beyond our reach yet so easily obtainable for your peers.

I hold you still, despite your disappointment with the results of the standardized test your school used to attack your intelligence and self-esteem. I held you in the grocery store in Las Vegas when, at 5 years old, you cried for an hour due to your realization that you would never be white (and afforded assumed humanity), like white people in the family.

I continue to hold you as our family struggles with internal racial strife; it must be confusing to have frank racial talk about the many failures of well-intentioned white people while sharing your home and heart with an imperfect and even offending, good-natured white person. Believe *me* buddy, I've been where you are.

I hold you, fully aware that you don't quite understand why we're always telling you to be quiet, brush your hair *more* frequently, wear *more* lotion, move *more* deliberately. It must feel as though you

3

live in a box made of delicate, sound and image-sensitive glass
attuned to your own specific playful tremors.

I'm sorry about this Kaleb. I'm sorry for trying to hold you
responsible for the failures and dangers of a world that is against
you.

I'm sorry for my inability to provide a "reasonable" response for your
questions…or better yet, for being unable to proactively equip you
with an adequate shield against all the bullshit. I'm sorry that my
"holding" has not been accompanied by balanced empowerment and
consistent indictment against the fact that you have to be "held" all
of the time.

I have spent too much time in our life together speaking about what
you shouldn't do in order to avoid the worst possible repercussions of
being a young Black man. And I have paid far too little attention to
decrying and denouncing the ridiculous lies that make our defenses
necessary. I sometimes approach my stints of parenting in a way that
borders too close to "blaming the victim" (i.e. you) for the racism
they face.

And I'm truly sorry Kaleb, that acknowledging my own powerlessness in
thwarting oppression in your life (and the lives of your siblings) has
made me much more hesitant to consider expanding my family with
children of my own.

I should have kept in mind the wise words that James Baldwin shared
with his own nephew:

*"You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced
because you were black and for no other reason. The limits to your
ambition were thus expected to be settled. You were born into a
society which spelled out with brutal clarity and in as many ways as
possible that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected
to aspire to excellence. You were expected to make peace with
mediocrity...The details and symbols of your life have been
deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say
about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as
what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your
inferiority, but to their inhumanity and fear."*

I can tell you from experience Kaleb, that these words remain true and relevant today. Your movements have already been policed and they will continue to be. And it is important to keep in mind what may occur when our behaviors as Black men do not align with the expectations of those with/in power.

Just yesterday, a white man named George Zimmerman was allowed to walk away free for his crime of murdering a young Black teenager named Trayvon Martin. Many people (myself included) are devastated, enraged, despondent, and indignant over this turn of events. The US has once again confirmed its complete disdain for People of Color and its unwavering loyalty to the principles of white supremacy. Of course, we have witnessed this sad state of events many times before and should maintain low expectations at all times. However, even though the racist ruling was somewhat expected, the utter despair felt by myself and countless others cannot be overstated.

In more than one way, Trayvon's untimely death and Zimmerman's unjust acquittal served as my catalyst to write you this letter. I stayed awake all night, thinking about you and the millions of Black and Brown children in our country who will soon reach an age where they're able to walk to the neighborhood convenience store for candy and iced tea.

I thought about how you may soon resemble the imagined "fucking punks" Zimmerman was targeting when he happened upon Trayvon. I worried that you might end up as collateral damage; caught in a war of nihilism and disenfranchisement. I wonder whether your mom will begin to hug you longer before you leave for school each day…just in case it may be the last time she sees you alive.

I think I was about ten when I began to understand the delicate dance we must take part in with the world in order to stay alive. And I think it's important that you understand the cops and their everyday deputies as threats to your well-being.

Reflecting on all of this, the thought of your harassment and premature death is too much to bear.

I am sitting here on my couch, seething with anger, sadness, and resolve; vacillating between hot, flushed tears and explicit tirades.

I spent the better part of the evening posting furiously about Trayvon on facebook and engaging in numerous social media battles with ignorant "friends" who give meaning to the word "microaggression."

I'm tired Kaleb. I'm fatigued. But I can't shake the feeling that I need to continue teaching and writing about these things until the time when the fear I feel in the bottom of my gut for you, Jordyn, and Logan is significantly reduced.

The anger I have is immense and multilayered; justified by yesterday's debacle and the everyday experiences we share with other Black people. Given the permanent fixture of racism in our society, I understand that this fear and concern may never go away. This is a life-long struggle…waged long before you or I were born…that will most likely continue long after we're gone.

However, I want you to know that Baldwin was absolutely right when he told his nephew:

*"There is no reason for you to try to become like white men and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept **you**…They are in effect still trapped in a history which they do not understand and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them indeed know better, but as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know."*

Understanding this is really a large part of the battle you are already waging Kaleb. I hope you are encouraged by the fact that you're on the pathway to this knowledge far earlier than any of us were. Also, please know that you come from an incredible family and community…built on the strength, resilience, and resistance that has come to characterize the very essence of Black survival and liberation.

I leave you this message feeling even more rooted in that resolve. One way that I have learned how to respond to racism is through writing. I know you enjoy that as well (in addition to your art). And I can tell you that composing this note for you has been rather healing and restorative for me.

6

In a similar vein, I'm confident this letter will help instill and bolster your internal resources. I am also hopeful that this momentous demarcation of your first decade on this earth coincides with a hundred more annual celebrations of your success *in spite* of racism and oppression.

I'll call on Baldwin once more to remind us both that although the road ahead may be long, we must never forget:

"You come from sturdy peasant stock, men who picked cotton, dammed rivers, built railroads, and in the teeth of the most terrifying odds, achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity. You come from a long line of great poets, some of the greatest poets since Homer, One of them said, 'The very time I thought I was lost, my dungeon shook and my chains fell off.'"

I love you deeply and always will.

Happy Birthday Kaleb.

Your Uncle,
KENJUS

Chapter 1

A-Wake-in-Me: An Introduction

The overriding engine of US racism cut through my family's ambitions and desires. It coursed through our social and public encounters and our living rooms. Racism, the engine that drives the ship of the state's national and imperial projects, cuts through all of our lives and deaths inside and outside the nation, in the wake of its purposeful flow. -Christina Sharpe

In July of 2013, George Zimmerman, a 28-year-old white and Peruvian man in Sanford, Florida, was acquitted of the murder of Trayvon Martin, Zimmerman's Black[1] male teenage neighbor. Trayvon, an honors high school student en route to college, had barely reached his 17th birthday when he walked to a local convenience store to purchase ice tea and a bag of candy one tragic evening in February of 2012. As Trayvon walked *home*, he noticed he was being followed by a shadowy figure. Zimmerman was, in fact, tailing the honors student. The self-described "neighborhood watch captain," called the police after seeing ***"a real suspicious"*** person walking about in his neighborhood. Within the short span of his 4-minute conversation with the dispatch officer, Zimmerman suggests that Martin is ***"up to no good,"*** is under the influence of illicit ***"drugs or something,"*** and is most likely responsible for a string of local break-ins. Martin noticed the strange man was following him and looked at him directly at one point before attempting to run away. Despite receiving direction from the dispatch officer to cease following Trayvon, Zimmerman sprinted after the teenager, boldly proclaiming, ***"These assholes always get away."*** Unfortunately, the ensuing ten minutes were not recorded. Ultimately, Zimmerman attacked, shot, and killed Trayvon Martin.

I wrote the letter above and gave it to my nephew, Kaleb, a young Black male, on his 10th birthday; a mere 24 hours after I (and the rest of the world) learned that a South Florida jury

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[1] I use "Black" and "African-American" interchangeably throughout this dissertation to describe members of the African diaspora living in the US.

agreed with Zimmerman and validated his belief that his own life was reasonably at risk during his assault on the teenager. The verdict was reached despite the fact that Trayvon said he was *"scared"* as he walked in his neighborhood and attempted to run away from a grown man with a gun. *"Stop following me,"* were among his final words. Nevertheless, the jury determined that George Zimmerman acted out of self-defense and was therefore within the legal limits of Florida's controversial "Stand Your Ground" law when he slaughtered Trayvon.

Trayvon's murder and Zimmerman's trial became terraforming ruptures in 2013, serving as horrific, re-articulated theses for the ongoing catastrophe of premature Black death. In the ensuing aftermath of Trayvon's death and the subsequent advent of the Movement for Black Lives, there has been an exponential increase of public attention attuned to the spectacularized murders of Black people including Rekia Boyd, Eric Garner, Mike Brown, John Crawford, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, Philando Castille, among many Others[2]. And we've learned that these murders are not isolated aberrations. A 2013 report published by the Malcolm X Grassroots Organization, reflecting data from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), found that a Black person is murdered by the police or other non-Black vigilante approximately every 28 hours. In comparison, the previous highest rate of public executions of African-Americans occurred in 1919, during a summer in which white mobs violently lynched a person approximately once a week (Red, 1999). Considering this shocking and somber fact alongside the highly publicized murders of Eric Garner, Mike Brown, John Crawford, it appears

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[2] Several Black Femmes and Feminist scholars (Betts, 2018; Crenshaw, 2016; Senyonga, 2017; Spillers, 1987) whose work includes naming and tracking the mechanics of social death, contend that the names on this list of mostly cismen are likely more well-known compared to the countless Black transwomen and Black cisgender women who are ceaselessly murdered by police, vigilantes, and everyone else, in part, because (in addition to/as an aspect of misogynoir) the executions of these latter folks are not as satiating (in same way as Black cismen) in the form of visible, public consumption relative to their more imperative utility as irreplaceable and appetizing fodder for civil society in the intimate, private sphere. In other words, if *seeing* dead Black cismen serves as one layer of a sort of protective body for the antiblack vehicle; *knowing* there are constantly dead and dying Black Trans and Fat ciswomen is a crucial and comforting purr of the engine.

9

that present-day African Americans have endured one of the bloodiest periods in our collective history in the afterlife of slavery (Hartman, 1997).

In the years since Trayvon's death, my nephew Kaleb, now 15 years old, has grown into a thoughtful, inquisitive, loving, and compassionate person. I remain wary because personality, character, and promise were not taken into consideration in the murders of the previously mentioned individuals. Instead, Zimmerman's stalking of Trayvon was inspired by strong antiblack sentiment he openly shared on the 911 call. And, although John Crawford was carrying a toy he planned to purchase in an Ohio Wal-Mart, a white male called 911 and said that the 23-year-old had "**loaded the gun**" and was "**pointing it at customers**" (Stephens, 2014). Mike Brown, 18-years-old, was called a **"thug"** by observers immediately following his murder in Ferguson, MO (Michaels, 2014). A prominent newspaper headline read, **"Mike Brown was no Angel"** as details regarding the police shooting emerged (Harriet, 2014). And the cop who killed him said of the young man, **"It looked like a demon."** Thus, these young men were killed by the police and vigilantes because their phenotypical presence, their very existence as Black people, constituted viable threats in an antiblack world.

These pre and post murder meditations constitute what Harvard psychiatrist, Chester Pierce called racial microaggressions; automatic, everyday acts of racial terror, torture, and disaster that are rooted in and help reify the conjoined poles of white[3] supremacy and Black non-

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[3] The racial designation "white" is not capitalized throughout the dissertation since the term is not a collective title chosen by a marginalized group of people. Capitalizing both "white" and "Black" implies symmetry in status that is not a historical, social, or structural reality. The designation "Black" in numerous European and Arabic languages was first utilized as a weapon of racialization and dehumanization against millions of African captives and causalities of the Arabic and Transatlantic Slave Trade. In the afterlife of slavery, Black has re-appropriated by descendants of captives within and beyond the US as an identity marker, sociopolitical rallying coordinate, and everything in between in response to ever-present antiblackness that saturates our experiences. Renaming ourselves is a resistance response as well as a response of community affirmation. Given its sociohistorical ontology, the term "white" can only reasonably be used (and capitalized) in a similar way to "Black" as an implicit or explicit (conscious or unconscious) endeavor aligned with resurgent white supremacist and nationalist movements.

being (antiblackness) (1969; 1970; 1980; 1995). Of course, there is nothing literally "micro" about the horrific death of Trayvon Martin or Black people who are slain by police officers and vigilantes. However, Chester Pierce's framing of everyday racism does not intend to imply microaggressions are small, insignificant, or fleeting. On the contrary, Pierce (1974) said, "These problems are micro only in name, since their very number requires a total effort that is incalculable" (p. 250). Rather than trivialize these interactions, the term 'microaggression' positions this form of everyday racism at the most interpersonal and direct level of societal interaction within a larger system of institutional racism and ideologies of white supremacy. Thus, Pierce meant for the "micro" to allude to the mundane and incessant character of the aggression, not its severity (Watson and Perez-Huber, 2016). Microaggressions are a potent form of race-related stress that persistently wreaks havoc on the minds and bodies of People of Color.

Armed with this ontology of microaggressions, it is clear that the underlying antiblackness that animates police and vigilante's hunting of these children, shares the same toxic genome with the jurisprudence that sanctions their murders, as well as with the quotidian violence that manifests in the everyday lives of any given Black person. Derald Wing Sue (2010) has likened the impact of racial microaggressions to a "death by a million paper cuts." With this in mind as well as the words used to describe the countless victims of antiblack violence, it is almost as if the previously discussed Black men were destined for an early demise; be it by bullets or the biased structures, institutions, or interpersonal beliefs that animated them.

-The Bridge Is (always already) Over-

Figure 1.1[4]

Double click picture to play

Law Abiding
For Oscar Grant (February 27,1986-January 1,2009)
By Frank Wilderson

Don't slant the story to fit your needs
Bullets been catching hell from niggers long as I been
Born Like apples ok you got your few bad bullets
But most work hard and vote yes they vote and
Got wives and sweet kids in the clip
Who cradles them when a nigger vamps who says
What to them
Mrs. Bullet I have some bad news
Then what
It's about your husband Mr. John Fredrick Bullet
Or
May I call you Frieda
Frieda John Fredrick passed this evening
Now Frieda be strong for unsavory
Are the details
He died in a nigger's spine
Crushed on impact now Frieda don't cry
The D.A.'s on it
The judge has been briefed
And your husband's friends re
In the streets

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[4] Dave Chappelle (2000) predicted the future in his stand-up "Killing Them Softly." In December, 2018, Dallas Police Officer Amber Guyger forced her way into Botham Shem Jean's apartment; Guyger shot and killed Botham upon entry (Hanna, 2018).

Law Abiding is predicated on the absence of reciprocity, utility, and contingency …[An] absence of humanity…The poem suggests that a family of murdering, inanimate bullets could have its grief and loss processed as grief and loss *more readily* than the family of a Black murder victim. Law Abiding doesn't assume that the touchstones of cohesion which make [family relations] legible will or can be extended to Blacks. There is—in this poem—no mutual futurity into which Blacks and others will find themselves. The future belongs to the bullet. [Family relations] belongs to the bullet. Our caring energies will be reserved not for the Black but for the bullet. Reciprocity is not a constituent element of the struggle between beings who are socially dead and those who are socially alive—the struggle between Blacks and the world (Wilderson, 2016).

Wilderson (2015) amongst others (Chappelle, 2007; Fanon, 1967; Dumas and Ross, 2016; Sexton, 2003; Wynter, 1993) argue that essential rationale for Black suffering is not rooted in past transgressions to avoid, racial discriminatory hurdles to overcome, or a table we've yet to gain seats at. Instead, our prior/ongoing crime and perpetual punishment is one of *existence;* existence in *a* world[5] both predicated and parasitic on a totalizing debasement of blackness. In this way, our essential struggle against racism is not one waged between us and a privileged white society that exploits People of Color or hoards ill-begotten resources. Instead, the battle is between Blacks and the world itself. This line of thought echoes Derrick Bell's (1992) contention that "…all of history verifies," that the existence of the United States (of the West) is

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[5] Anthony Trochez (2019) maintains that, "We live in a world predicated on the need for widespread violence and oppression" (p. 16). However, it is important to note the inherent distinction between the concepts of "world" and "Earth." Drawing once more from Trochez, "World and Earth" are not synonyms; the term 'world' is a social construct commonly used to describe…the ideological understandings of where we live and how we might want to live in these places (think worldview)…I use the word 'Earth' to describe our home which we share with all the living, breathing, feeling beings we share place with"(p.16) I uplift Trochez's distinction and utilize the word "world" in a similar way. The ongoing "antiblack" world I am referring to (in which we currently reside) has ontological roots stretching back to around 620 A.D. when Arabs began enslaving Africans; simultaneously demarcating and tethering the bodily coordinates of what would become present day "black racial phenotype" to an always already (i.e. genealogical) a priori debased status as slave (Anderson, 2007; Segal, 2002; Wilderson, 2017). Others (Curry, 2017; Wynter, 2003; Rose, 2010) frame the antagonism of the world as one between "HuMans" and "Not Humans." However, the "not" is emphasizing the negation of the former. In this sense, "blackness" serves as *the* fundamental counterpoint of negation against which the Human (the anthropocentric figure) obtains and sustains coherence.

founded upon on centuries of antiblack violence and suffering. This concrete remains intact even as the expressive mechanisms or aesthetics of antiblackness have evolved overtime (Bell, 2004). Current day Blacks are thus tasked with existing in and navigating environments that are, in and of themselves, extremely, mundanely (as in ordinarily) hazardous to our health (Carroll, 1998).

In writing a letter to my nephew in the immediate aftermath of the Zimmerman verdict, I sought to address the very real (ongoing) crisis underlying the experiences of Black men and simultaneously seek refuge from the pain and fear I felt existing in our antiblack society. At the time, I hoped that my Baldwin-inspired adages offered Kaleb potentially protective pathways, out of sight alleys, that might serve to shield him from the impact of the inevitable onslaught of everyday racial microaggressions and the more spectacular forms of antiblack violence they reflected. Thanks to the Ancestors, Creator, and sage wisdom from our family, Kaleb has avoided police brutality.

However, Kaleb has endured and remains vulnerable to everyday enactments of antiblackness from nonblack neighbors, peers, teachers, store merchants, etc. According to Martinot and Sexton (2002) such individuals are the actual police, deputized to observe, report, corral, and control Black bodies, minds, behaviors, and beingness for the sake of the project of antiblack civil society. Whereas, official police officers (individuals with visible badges, innately legal guns, and methodical training) are merely the last line of defense called into service when the normal vanguard require assistance. The collaboration between these two strands of the police has become more apparent recently in the documented practice of nonblack people (everyday vanguard) calling the police (last line of defense) on Black people for the crime of mundane existence.[6] Given the scope and entrenchment of antiblack policing and violence in the

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[6] For instance, in 2018 alone, Black people had the police called on them for being Black while: Barbequing in a local park (Guynn, 2018), sitting in a Starbucks (Meyer, 2018), shopping at a CVS (May, 2018), selling water

everyday, I am not certain the coping mechanisms I advocated in the letter are actually good for

Kaleb's (or my own) well being.

Unfortunately, although scholars (Solórzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000), educators (Carter,

2007), activists (itooamharvard, 2013), and health experts (Smedley, Jefferies, Aldeman, and

Lang, 2008) across various disciplines have confirmed the detrimental impact of racism on the

internalized attitudes, actions, behaviors, and health outcomes of Blacks, we know less about

how we can respond to everyday racism in a healthy manner (Myers, 2010). Moreover, even as I

face forward and focus on assisting my nephew (and larger family) with the ongoing trials of

antiblackness, I am compelled to always, like a Sankofa bird, reflect back on the lessons of the

elders in my life who have navigated toxic racism for an extended period of time. With every

word I write for this document, I am reminded that I commenced my doctoral program in the

heavy wake created by the then-recent transition of my Uncle Derrick. I am still angry and feel

robbed that, despite Derrick's balanced attention and methodical success in all matters related to

faith, kindness, peace, family, finances, love, *and* health, he became an Ancestor at the age of 62,

following a second massive heart attack. It is also never far from my mind that just within the

last five years, all three of my mom's younger brothers, Uncle Ronald, Uncle Eddy, and Uncle

Ken, who are relatively healthy and under the age of 60, have battled some form of cancer. Thus,

in a very real and very urgent way, buttressing the impact of antiblack bullets and bias is a

relentless endeavor on behalf of our past and our prologue

(May, 2018), mowing lawns (WKYC, 2018), selling hotdogs (Wigdahl, 2018), going to the store (Shannon, 2018), attempting to enter their home (Hafner, 2018), playing golf (Woodall and Boeckal, 2018), staying at an Air BnB (Yancey-Bragg, 2018), sleeping in a common room in their dormitory (May, 2018), visiting the pool (Price, 2018), and running a business (May, 2018).

In contrast to vast improvements of the health status for the white US population, Blacks continue to bear a disproportionate burden in disease diversity and morbidity (Geronimus et al., 1996). McCord and Freeman (1990) made headlines when their study found that, on average, a Black male in Harlem was less likely to reach the age of 65 than a male resident of Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries on the planet (Mays, Cochran, & Barnes, 2007; Smith et al., 2011). In fact, the average lifespan of contemporary African-Americans is equivalent to that of whites in America over 40 years ago (Williams and Jackson, 2005). Although Blacks are disproportionately poor, these morbidity and mortality disparities are not the result of poverty alone (Solórzano et al., 2000). Even when socioeconomic status is controlled for, there is still an excess of 38,000 premature Black deaths per year, or collectively 1.1 million years of life lost among African-Americans in the United States (Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010). Health experts proclaim that these *early* deaths arise from a broad spectrum of ills which disproportionately impact Black communities, namely coronary heart disease, cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.

Furthermore, Clark, Anderson, Clark and Williams (1999) argue that the high frequency of these stress-related diseases and subsequent early demise amongst African-Americans stem from their chronic exposure to racial discrimination. Race-related stress has been tied to negative psychological outcomes amongst Blacks and has been implicated as a major contributor to the abysmal rate of Black morbidity and mortality in the US (Williams and Mohammed, 2009). Amidst these disappointing data, African-American men remain "the most vulnerable racial-gender group for almost every health condition that medical researchers monitor" and feature the

16

lowest life expectancy of any cohort in the country (CDC, 2016; Geronimus et al., 1996; Smith

et al., 2011, p. 63).

Microaggressions and Black Men

Black males are also the most vulnerable US racial-gender group for college attrition and

account for only 4.3 percent of all college undergraduates, an identical percentage to the rate of

their enrollment in 1976 (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Harper, 2006a; Harper, 2012). Less

than 34% of Black men who begin a college career go on to receive a diploma within 4-7 years

(Harper, 2006a; Harper, 2013). As educators and policy makers seek out prominent catalysts

fueling these data, Black men themselves often cite racially hostile campus climates and

exposure to racial microaggressions as fundamentally detrimental to their academic success

(Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano, 2007b). Black men's exposure to racial microaggression has been

positively correlated with their attrition at purposively white colleges and universities (PWIs)[7]

(Harper, 2006; Harper, 2009).

As previously mentioned, racial microaggressions are: (1) verbal and non-verbal assaults

directed toward People of Color, often carried out in subtle, automatic or unconscious forms (2)

layered assaults, based on a Person of Color's race, gender, class, sexuality, language,

immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname and (3) cumulative assaults that take a

psychological and physiological toll on People of Color (Solórzano, et al., 2000). Chester Pierce

originally labeled these forms of racism, *offensive mechanisms*: stunning, automatic acts of

disregard that stem from underlying attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of

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[7]Similar to other scholars (Smith et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007) studying racial microaggressions who use
"historically white institutions" instead of "predominantly white institutions," I use "purposively white institutions"
to emphasize that the gross numbers or percentages of white students have less to do with constituting the majority
population than it does with the intentional, historical and contemporary racialized infrastructure that is in place, the
current campus racial climate, culture and ecology, and how these modern-day institutions still benefit Whites at the
expense of Blacks and other groups of color.

Black inferiority (1969; 1970; 1980). The renowned Harvard psychiatrist argued that their "lingering intractability is a major contributor to the continuing traumatic stress suffered by Blacks as individuals and as a group" (pp. 327-328). In this way, the subtle, ambiguous, constant, and cumulative impact of these interpersonal "put-downs of blacks" may represent severe psychological consequences for their targets and constitute a potent form of race-related stress (Smith, Yosso, Solórzano, 2006).

Thus, Black men (and other Students of Color) are not merely unmotivated dropouts or unlucky, collateral targets of a few independently mean, white students. On the contrary, studies consistently find Black males are most at risk and constantly besieged by a systemic attack of interpersonal and institutional racism within predominantly white college environments (Harper, 2006a; Harper, 2013; Smith, Allen, and Danley, 2007a; Solórzano, et al., 2000). In fact, a strong relationship exists between the microaggressions faced by Black men and the dismal rate of their retention in higher education (Harper, 2006a; Smith et al., 2007).

However, Black men who are somehow retained PWIs, despite a prevalence of racial hostility, tend to suffer higher levels of stress-related health issues than any other racial-gender group on campus (Smith et al., 2011). This is not a coincidence given the fact that continued exposure to racial slights and insults places a significant toll and negatively impacts the minds and bodies of People of Color (Smith et al., 2007). Unfortunately, as a racial-gender group frequently targeted by racial microaggressions on PWIs, Black men undergo painful experiences whether en route to attrition or a diploma (Smith et al., 2011). Those African-American men who persist through graduation into a professional career are additionally faced with increased exposure to hostile white professional environments compared to those who are not granted "access" by virtue of their diploma. Thus, rather than inoculate Black people from the pain of

racism, increased exposure in higher education seems to place African-American men in a double-bind; our progression through places deemed as "successful" is often accompanied by racial microaggressions and battle fatigue, stress-related morbidity, and lowered life expectancy (Harper, 2006; Harper, 2012; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

In response, scholars have focused their lens on exploring how Black collegiate men respond to and cope with "everyday racial invalidations" on PWIs (Harper, 2009; Harper, 2012; Solórzano et al., 2000). Their research suggests Black men experience positive psychological outcomes when they engage in critical race pedagogy (Lynn, 2004), access racial counterspaces (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000), and rely upon Black peers to prepare for racial affronts to human dignity (Harper & Quaye, 2007, Harper, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). Despite the promising mental health outcomes for Black men engaged in these specific racial socialization experiences on PWIs, we know less about their impact on the current or long term *physical* and *physiological* health of Black men (Mays and Cochran, 2007). In fact, there is considerable debate amongst scholars as to how educators should prepare Black men to appraise, cope with, and respond to microaggressions during and after college.

Study Intervention

The proposed study explores the biopsychosocial impact of racial microaggressions in the lives of a select group of Black male college students at UCLA. I aim to provide insight into the health outcomes associated with their varied socialization, appraisal, response, and coping strategies. I am utilizing a transformative sequential mixed method (Creswell 2002) to collect qualitative, quantitative and biostatistical data in order to contribute to our current understanding of the nature and impact of chronic exposure to race-related stress. The guiding tenants and goals of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) inform the conceptual framework,

questions, methodology, and analyses of the present study. With this in mind, I seek to equip educators, scholars, policy makers, and Black men (amongst other marginalized groups) with research-based strategies to recognize, resist, and respond to everyday racism in ways that enrich and extend life.

Overview of the Study: An Interdisciplinary Path

This study utilizes telomere length (Epel, Blackburn, Lin, Dhabhar, Adler, Morrow, & Cawthon, 2004), a powerful biometric of stress-related (vs. chronological) aging, in order to more reliably inform future studies on the long term impact of various appraisals, responses, and coping strategies amongst Black males. Telomeres are the stabilizing caps on chromosomes that protect human genetic data and make it possible for cells to divide (Blaskco, 2007). They have been likened to aglets, the plastic tips at the end of shoelaces that keep bundled threads from unraveling (Mays et al., 2007). Similarly, telomeres protect the ends of chromosomes, keeping them intact and ready for cell division. They shorten with each division over time and eventually reach a critical length that halts further division. Through this regular shortening they mark time, and eventually cause cells to stop dividing and/or to die. As a result the length of telomeres is inversely related to chronological age (Cawthon, Smith, O'Brien, Sivathchenko, & Kerber, 2003; Epel et. al, 2004).

Recent research has established a relationship between exposure to stressful situations and accelerated aging marked by telomere shortening (Epel et al., 2004, Geronimus et al., 2010). Because the excess morbidity and mortality experienced by Blacks seemingly stems from our persistent exposure to multifactorial stressors experienced over a lifespan, researchers may expect to observe disparate telomere shortening amongst this population (Geronimus et al., 2010). In fact, shorter telomere length has been associated with many chronic diseases known to

20

have marked Black-white health disparities, such as hypertension, atherosclerosis, cirrhosis, and diabetes (Cawthon et al., 2003). Additionally, in a recent study on telomere length and exposure to racism, researchers found that Black males experienced accelerated aging (marked by telomere length) in response to overt and covert experiences of racial discrimination (Chae, Nuru-Jeter, Adler, Brody, Lin, Blackburn, Epel, 2014). Thus, as a marker of the presence or absence of cumulative stress and physiologic wear and tear, telomere length may be a particularly relevant measure to ascertain the impact of racial microaggressions and subsequent responses of Black men.

Guiding Research Questions

In this initial dissertation study, I seek to understand which parental racial socialization messages, appraisal tendencies, coping mechanisms, and response strategies in the face of race-related stress may be tied with more holistically healthful experiences amongst a group of Black collegiate men. I address the following questions through mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis:

1. What are the potential inferences of relationships between participants' reported recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions and their telomere length?

Rationale 1

Several scholars have documented the experiences of Black men within purposefully white post-secondary environments (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2004; Harper, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000; Solórzano, Allen, Carroll, 2002) Although it is clear that these students are not characterized as monolithic (Harper and Nichols, 2008; Howard and Reynolds, 2013; Strayhorn, 2013), several shared realities seem to cut across their variance in ethnic, sexual, social, political, and socioeconomic identity. More specifically, the majority of germinal (Allen, Epps, and Haniff, 1991; Allen, 1992, Cheatham, 1986; Fleming, 1985; Sedlacek and Brooks, 1987) and

contemporary studies in Education (Harper and Harris III, 2010; Howard and Reynolds, 2013; Smith et al., 2007; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, and Lynn, 2004) suggest that Black male students at PWIs are consistently besieged by racial discrimination as they navigate hostile campus climates. In order to better serve these Black students, scholars in Education (Smith et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2011; Solórzano et al., 2000) and Psychology (Mitchell, 2011; Sue et al., 2007; Torres et al., 2010; Watkins et al., 2010) have dutifully tracked the impact of microaggressions on the mental health of Black men. Empirical studies have confirmed that the "everyday racism" of microaggression qualifies as a potent form of race-related stress in the lives of Black men during and after their time on PWIs.

However, despite the unanimity of these findings as well as the validation of the biopsychosocial model of human health (Clark et al., 1999), more than a few detractors remain unconvinced that racism is involved in the physical health disparities experienced by Black men and other Communities of Color (Harris, 2009). Colleagues in Neuroscience (Wyatt, Myers, Williams, Kitchen, Loeb, Carmona, and Presley, 2002), Public Health (Epel et al., 2004; Geronimus, Hicken, Keene, and Bound, 2006) and Social Epidemiology (Chae et al., 2014; Williams, Neighbors, and Jackson, 2003) have attempted to address this skepticism by conducting research that explores the potential biological and physical consequences of social ills. A growing number of these individuals have collaborated with social scientists in Sociology and Psychology to pioneer innovative studies utilizing biological markers, such as telomeres, to track the cumulative impact of social stress on the body (Chae et al., 2014, McEwan, 2007).

A seminal study found a correlation between the stress experienced by mothers of autistic children and premature degeneration of telomeres (Epel et al., 2004), indicating their accelerated biological aging. The Observer (2014), the flagship magazine of the Association for

22

Psychological Science recently featured the relatively new body of research on telomere

degeneration and lauded the area of study as the next important direction of scholarship for

Psychology. This research is promising in exploring and potentially discovering causal pathways

between the racial microaggressions (experienced as race-related stress) endured by successful

Black collegiate males and their lowered life expectancy. However, very few published studies

to- date have tested the rate of telomere degeneration amongst Black males, finding a

relationship between experiences with racial discrimination and accelerated degeneration (Chae

et al., 2014). Additionally, despite collaborative scholarship across social and physical science

disciplines, none of the current research on telomeres has considered the specific context of

educational environments. Finally, although several articles that measure the impact of stress on

telomeres, mention race-related stress, there are no known research studies that disaggregate the

potential impact of ambiguous, persistent microaggressions on telomere degeneration. Given this

paucity in our understanding, I will utilize quantitative methods to seek out a potential inference

of relationships between participants' recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions

and their relative telomere length.

2. What racial socialization messages and appraisals of racial microaggressions are utilized by Black collegiate men with varied telomere lengths?

Rationale 2

Scholars have lauded proactive and protective racial socialization as implicative in

positive psychological outcomes amongst Students of Color who are exposed to

microaggressions (Harrell, 2000; Lynn, 2004; Stevenson, 2016; Solórzano and Villalpando,

1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano et al., 2002). However, there are ongoing debates across

the literature regarding the short and long-term psychological, physiological, and physical health

outcomes associated with racial socialization messages that encourage Black youth to expect and

prepare for frequent encounters with racism (Brondolo, ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, and

Contrada, 2009). For example, some scholars have observed positive outcomes for Black

individuals who are aware of the extent of the harm they may face (Harrell, 2000). There are also

studies that show that threat appraisals that frequently anticipate and are wary of racism may

contribute to hypervigilance and subsequent negative health effects amongst Blacks (Brewer,

Carson, Williams, Allen, Jones, and Cooper, 2013). I plan to utilize qualitative focus group data

to obtain a better understanding of how participants experience and internalize racial

socialization from their parents and caretakers. I will also examine the focus group participants'

appraisals (recognition) of everyday racism.

3. What might we learn from the Black males' coping (response) strategies in light of their varied telomere lengths (consequences/long-term effects)?

Rationale 3:

Several studies of race-related stress in Psychology paint a more complicated picture of

which types of responses might lead to healthier outcomes amongst Black males (Brondolo et al.,

2009). There is not yet broad agreement amongst scholars and Black males (and other

marginalized students) endure persistent attacks on their dignity without clear pathways to

restorative responses. After collecting data from the quantitative and qualitative components of

questions 1 and 2, I plan to investigate and analyze any potential interaction between the noted

telomere length and focus group-based discussion of participation in various coping mechanisms.

Furthermore, several studies of race-related stress in Psychology paint a more complicated

picture of which types of responses might lead to healthier outcomes amongst Black males

(Brondolo et al., 2009). There has been no large-scale social epidemiological study regarding the

impact of race-related coping mechanism on physical health (Brondolo et al., 2009). Therefore

my proposed mixed method approach may provide scholars across Education, Psychology, and

Health with a more holistic understanding of how marginalized people should respond to everyday forms of oppression.

Theoretical Framework

Utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) allows us to understand the unique set of stress-related challenges facing Black males. A group of law scholars first conceptualized Critical Race Theory in order to account for the persistent growth of racial disparity in the US despite the ratification of landmark legislation designed specifically to thwart institutionalized racism (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001). Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado utilized CRT to examine the prevalence of systemic racism in the US, affirm the *intuitional authority* of People of Color to analyze that system from within its re-appropriated margins, and identify effective strategies of resistance against a seemingly permanent organization of society into racial hierarchies (Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). As a theoretical framework, methodology, and tool of praxis, CRT is principally concerned with empowering People of Color, leveraging sophisticated critiques of white supremacy, and dismantling racism in accordance with a larger goal of eliminating all forms of social oppression (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001).

I introduced this dissertation study with a letter to my nephew regarding Zimmerman's sanctioned killing of Trayvon Martin. However, as is now hopefully clear, the ongoing overt hunting and murdering of Black men is one *spectacularized* performance of violence through which the antiblack world calibrates and maintains its desired coordinates. Thus, I also attempted to prepare Kaleb to confront more everyday forms of antiblackness stemming from the less overt vanguard of the police (Sexton, 2002). There is, undoubtedly, much to learn from better understanding the potential biological impact related to how Black men appraise and cope with more physical and overt violence offered by the last line of police defense. However, mounting

25

research (Bor, Venkataramani, Williams, and Tsai, 2018) is suggesting that, in addition to being definitively bad for my (and other Black people's) health, perusing and reporting on an increasingly available and commodified archive of present-day Black snuff videos does not do much beyond reify the underlying logic animating the violence (Browne, 2015). Sadiyah Hartman (1997) elaborates this point in the introduction to her text on the everyday terrors of slavery, *Scenes of Subjection.* More specifically, although many books about the experiences of African captives of the US feature in detail the violent, bodily intrusions of enslaved individuals, Hartman provides a compelling rationale to instead, attune our rigorous observations on dynamics associated with the quotidian nature of everyday harm.

> I have chosen not to reproduce the 'terrible spectacle' of [the beating of Frederick Douglass's Aunt Hester by the slave master] in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body. Rather than inciting indignation, too often they immure us to pain by virtue of their familiarity- the oft-repeated or restored character of these accounts and our distance from them reinforce the spectacular character of Black suffering...I have chosen instead to look *elsewhere* and consider those scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned. By defamiliarizing the familiar, I hope to illuminate the terror of the *mundane* and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle. – Hartman, 1997, pp. 3-4.

In the proceeding chapters, I attempt to further contribute to this work of "defamiliarizing the familiar" elucidating how the sometimes difficult to discern "...terror of the mundane and quotidian," disrupt our integrity at an intimate, cellular level. As a Critical Race Theorist, I do hope this particular Sankofa provides at least an aglet's wor1th of useful edification, restitution, and resolution for other Black and marginalized people who are navigating this antagonistic terrain.

Chapter 2

Like a Splinter in Your Mind:
Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

*For years we thought racism was an aberration. A defect on the American scene;
one that was a holdover from slavery; One that we had the tools to correct
through law and one that there was a desire to correct. And it's taken us a long
time to recognize that was a wrong diagnosis…racism serves an important
stabilizing function in a society that is built on property. –Derrick Bell, 1992*

I seek to understand which appraisal tendencies, coping mechanisms, and response

strategies in the face of race-related stress correlate with more holistically healthful experiences

amongst Black collegiate men. In order to better explore and analyze this problem, I will address

the following questions through a mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis:

1) What are the potential inferences of relationships between participants' reported
   recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions and their telomere length?
2) What racial socialization messages and appraisals of racial microaggressions are utilized
   by Black collegiate men with varied telomere lengths?
3) What might we learn from the Black males' coping (response) strategies in light of their
   varied telomere lengths (consequences/long-term effects)?

This chapter provides an overview of the existing published literature regarding

microaggressions, Black collegiate men, and the potential of a unique biometric measures to

inform our understanding of their stress-related appraisal, coping, and response strategies. Thus,

I review and discuss studies relevant to the research questions listed above in order to identify

potential contradictions, paucities, and areas worthy of further investigation. Prior to doing so, I

also employ an interdisciplinary Critical Race Theoretical lens to more holistically explore

research on Black males and discrimination as discussed throughout the fields of Education,

Psychology, and Public Health. In the interdisciplinary tradition of CRT in Education

(Solórzano, 1998), I am utilizing this approach in order to more effectively document the impact

of racial microaggressions on Black collegiate men and to provide educators, policy makers, and

health providers with valuable tools in their consideration of this population. I offer a discussion

of the theoretical framework along with pertinent literature regarding Black collegiate males, the

impact of racial microaggressions, and the potential of biomarkers to assist scholars in better

documenting and fighting everyday racism.

Theoretical Framework

As a researcher, a theory is a lens by which we view and interpret social life…When I see something [in social life] a theory often comes to mind [as I think], "how can I explain what I'm seeing." As you turn the lens things become clear. – Daniel Solórzano, 2013

Theorizing Race and Racism:

Scholars, within and outside of Education have long agreed that race is a sociopolitical,

not a biological, construct; one that is created and reinforced by social and institutional norms

and practices, as well as individual attitudes and behaviors (hooks, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2006;

Tatum, 1997). According to authorities in social science, the sociopolitical construct of race

emerged historically in the United States in order to justify and secure the social, political, and

economic dominance that wealthy, Western European colonist/settlers self-defined as "white"

held over other people defined as "not white" (first Indigenous and Native Americans and

enslaved Africans and later Mexicans, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, and South Asians and others

racialized as "not white") (Omi and Winant, 1994). Motivated by economic interests and

entrenched through law and public policy, the process of racialization unfolded historically and

is continually reinvented to perpetuate economic, political, and social advantage for peoples

racialized and constructed as white within the United States (Bell, 2004; Delgado and Stefancic,

2001). White supremacy defines this process and is also the name of the complicated system it

sustains (Zuniga and Nagda, 2001).

Social scientists (Fletcher, 2001; Tatum, 1997) have therefore described racism as the set

of institutional, cultural, and interpersonal patterns and practices that create advantages for

people legally defined and socially constructed as "white," and the corollary disadvantages for people defined as "non-white" or People of Color in the US This system of advantage is maintained by the conscious and unconscious participation of "white" structures, institutions, norms, and people as well as the internalized and horizontal oppression of People of Color (Tatum, 1997; Omi and Winant, 1997; Wise, 2005).

Race and racism are complicated phenomena that remain deeply embedded within the fabric of our society. White supremacy has operated through a myriad of overt acts of physical and psychological violence against Communities of Color in the US ever since its insidious inception (Anzaldúa, 1989; Baldwin, 1969; hooks, 2004; Lorde 1987). The system of racism is supported within the nation's founding documents, its jurisprudence spanning local, district, state, federal, and executive courts, its military campaigns, its media, and in the overt and informal social practices of its citizenry (Bell, 1994; Crenshaw, 1987; Smith, 2010; Zuniga and Nagda, 2007). Although the tactics of white supremacist violence remain entrenched within the organizing principles of the US, the language, strategy, mythos, and specific pathos of racism have adapted, mutated, and evolved over time (Bell, 1992; Dovidio and Gaertner, 2004).

For example, contemporary whites remain the primary beneficiaries of the inequitable distribution of societal resources (Tatum, 1997; Wise, 2004). Moreover, since at least the mid 1970s, People of Color have been tasked with providing even more specific evidence of discrimination in light of the so-called "intent-doctrine" and the "underground" shift of racism to a more aversive (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2004), subtle (Duckitt, 1993), symbolic (Sears, 1988), and unconscious (Lawrence, 1987; 2007) manifestation. Although, whites have never been apt to acknowledge their own bias and disproportionate privilege (Wise, 2005), contemporary European Americans are more likely to report believing that Elvis Presley is alive than that racial

discrimination constitutes a legitimate threat to the full societal participation of People of Color (Wise, 2007). Additionally, amongst whites who are willing to acknowledge the potential reality of racial inequity, very few see themselves (or those they associate with) as somehow complicit in the larger system (Bonilla Silva, 2006). Thus, unfortunately, racism remains permanent, despite persistent and multifaceted forms of resistance (Bell, 1992; 1994). This reality perplexes many an educator. And white supremacy does not appear to have a perceivable end, despite the oft-referenced year of 2040, during which People of Color will reportedly constitute an official numerical majority in the US.

As Solórzano and Perez Huber (2012) argue, racism, and the potential damage it does to our society, are merely visible symptoms of the larger and even more insidious disease of white supremacy. This observation stems from the perspective of former NAACP attorney Robert Carter (1988) who reflected on the persistence of race-based educational inequity following the landmark 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* decision:

> …The NAACP lawyers erred. The lawyers did not understand then how effective white power could be in preventing full implementation of the law; nor did it realize at the time that the basic barrier to full equality for blacks was not racial segregation, a symptom, but white supremacy, the disease (p.1095).

Given the permeation and permanence of the disease of white supremacy in the U.S, it is incumbent upon current scholars to advance theoretical frameworks that are equally focused and ceaseless in accurately interpreting and disrupting racism. Additionally, a multifunctional theoretical approach is required as I attempt to observe and interrupt the deleterious impact of racial microaggressions on Black men. I posit that utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) allows us to understand the unique set of challenges facing Black males in higher education.

Critical Race Theory in Education:

I would argue that as you turn the Critical Race lens, race and racism come into focus, because they're central to the analysis. And I have to say this, in my work I don't apologize… for centering race and racism…I argue that Critical Race Theory is the work of scholars who are attempting to develop an explanatory framework that accounts for the role of race and racism in education…and works towards identifying and challenging racism. So there's a social justice element of Critical Race Theory…it's not just about observing and interpreting; it's about engaging, as apart of a larger goal of identifying and challenging all forms of subordination. – Daniel Solórzano, 2013

A group of law scholars first conceptualized Critical Race Theory in the late 1970s in order to account for the stubborn entrenchment and vigorous growth of racial injustice that occurred in the US in spite of the ratification of landmark legislation designed specifically to thwart racial apartheid (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001). Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado, amongst others, utilized CRT to examine the mechanisms of systemic racism in the U.S, affirm the cultural intuition of People of Color, analyze that system from within its reappropriated margins, and identify meaningful paths of resistance against a seemingly permanent organization of society into racial hierarchies (Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). As a theoretical framework, methodology, and tool of praxis, CRT is principally concerned with informing and assisting People of Color, leveraging sophisticated critiques of white supremacy/antiblackness, and working towards dismantling racism in accordance with a larger goal of eliminating all forms of social oppression (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). These aims emanate from four foundational pillars or conglomeration of theoretical agreements concerning legal analysis. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) operationalized these pillars as:

1). **Whiteness as Property[8]:** Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) argues that The US is built on a foundation that accords citizens several unalienable rights. These rights hinge on the "right to own property." In this legal and institutionalized arrangement, holding aspect of whiteness

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[8] See Harris (1993) for more on "Whiteness as Property"

(pigmentation, phenotype, European culture, English language, colonial education, religious beliefs, values) affirms one's distance from blackness and subsequently justifies varying degrees of access to privileges and benefits accorded holders of citizenship (i.e. white wealthy maleness).[9]

2). Interest Convergence[10]: Interest convergence (Bell, 1994) maintains that the racial, economic, psychological, and health interests of People of Color will be only be registered and engaged by societal institutions if and only if they somehow converge with the interests of maintaining or advancing white racial, economic, psychological, and health. The rare instances throughout US history when such convergences have occurred, temporary racial remedies are offered to Blacks and other People of Color. However, when these compromises are violently abrogated and the status quo is swiftly re-asserted at the moment when the racial remedies threaten to undermine the structural white superiority/black inferiority, or, conversely, when the well-being of whites and whiteness is no longer co-dependent on the veneer of trivial gains for Blacks and other People of Color.

3). Intersectionality[11]: Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is an analytical framework for processing dynamics of oppression that occur at junctions of socially constructed identities within a larger sociopolitical reality. An intersectional analysis aims to grapple with the

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[9] The significance of the right to own property was established in 1776 in the Declaration of Independence and further substantiated in the 4th and 5th amendments of the US Constitution (as well as the later 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights). As a slave-powered colony of the British empire, the US distinguished those who could own property (human/white male citizens) from non-humans (Blacks or Slaves) who were ontologically defined and corralled as actual property (the antithesis of humanness). Other groups were organized along the spectrum of varying proximity towards whiteness and away from blackness (i.e. poor white males, white women, and nonblack People of Color). In this way, whiteness (antiblackness) is "…the status quo…and neutral baseline" to which all groups in the US strive (Harris, 1993, p. 1715).

[10] See Bell (1994) for more on "Interest Convergence"

[11] See Crenshaw (1989) for more on "Intersectionality"

specificity of structural violence that wreaks havoc on members of socially defined groups by virtue of their intersecting positionality in the domains of race *and* gender *and* sexuality *and* sex *and* socioeconomic status etc. For example, the genre (Curry, 2017) of everyday racism endured by a Black (race), cisgender (gender) queer (sexuality) male (sex) from the working class (socioeconomic class) is necessarily distinct from the type of everyday racism experienced by a Black, transgender asexual woman who is temporarily unhoused. Intersectionality calls attention to and recognizes the failures of individual or flattened examinations of laws, policy, or everyday societal interactions given our positions within interlocking systems of oppression.

4). Racial Realism/Permanence: Although race was created (socially constructed) originally as a biological and eventually cultural domain of difference, its sociopolitical effects via racism are real. Because the US (and Western society) exist as a result of slavery and colonization, racism is endemic to and a permanent identifying feature of American society. Thus, although race was created (socially constructed) originally as a biological and eventually cultural domain of difference, its sociopolitical effects via racism are real. Illuminating this pillar, Derrick Bell maintained that "Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary 'peaks of progress,' short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance *as racial patterns adapt* **in ways that maintain white dominance**. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies." -Bell, 1992

These underlying arguments constitute the "ground" of CRT and serve as the foundation for the theory's expansion into other fields.

Education scholars have developed and utilized a discipline-specific CRT to address the persistence of racial inequity across multiple domains of the US system of education (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 1998; 2004; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998;

Yosso, 2006). Their efforts have helped define 5 distinct tenets of a Critical Race Theory in Education. They are as follows:

1) The Centrality of Race and Racism and its intersection with other forms of oppression: Race and racism are central in understanding students of color experience in the educational system
2) The Challenge to Dominant Ideology: CRT challenges dominant ideology pushing away from notions of objectivity and acknowledging subjectivity
3) The Commitment to Social Justice: CRT seeks to eliminate racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of injustice
4) The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge: CRT holds that experiential knowledge is central in learning that different experiences are valid to help subvert racism
5) The Interdisciplinary Perspective: CRT is transdisciplinary in nature meaning it draws on multiple theories and fields to understand racism. – (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002)

A History of CRT in Education:

Although the individual tenets of CRT do not represent novel perspectives in academic thought or praxis (given their heritage in the law), Solórzano and Yosso (2001) suggest that the process of constructing a cohesive Education-based approach has occurred relatively recently. For example, William Tate's (1994) autobiographical article, 'From inner city to ivory tower: does my voice matter in the academy' (featuring the first use of CRT principles in Education) appeared in the Journal of Urban Education less than 20 years ago. The foundational scholar was first informed of Critical Race Theory when, as a young faculty member, he happened upon a CRT law article amidst a group of ruffled papers belonging to his future wife who was studying to be a lawyer at the time (Tate, 2014). Within a year of the Urban Education article, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) drew much upheaval amongst education scholars with a paper titled, 'Toward a critical race theory of education' in the Teachers College Record. Two years later, Daniel Solórzano's (1997) essay on 'Images and words that wound: critical race theory, racial stereotyping and teacher education' in Teacher Education Quarterly applied CRT to a specific subfield of teacher education. Also in 1997, William Tate's 'Critical race theory and education:

history, theory and implications' in the Review of Research in Education furthered our understanding of the history of CRT in education. The field was expanded significantly with the 1998 'Special issue on critical race theory in education' in the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education. The 1999 edited book on Race is—race isn't: critical race theory and qualitative studies in education (Parker et al., 1999) was followed by individual scholars presenting on panels at professional conferences across the country and publishing their work in various journals. In 2002, the journals Qualitative Inquiry and Equity and Excellence in Education dedicated a special issue to CRT in education. In 2004, the American Education Research Association conference symposium 'And we are still not saved: critical race theory in education ten years later' acknowledged the ten-year anniversary of Tate's 1994 article introducing CRT officially to education. In 2013, Marvin Lynn and Adrienne Dixon published the Critical Race Theory in Education Handbook featuring foundational scholars.

In the 20th year since the first appearance of CRT in Education, engaged scholars and practitioners are striving towards developing and reimagining an explanatory framework that accounts for the role of race and racism in education and that works toward identifying and challenging racism as part of a larger goal of identifying and challenging all forms of subordination (Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano, 1998). Speaking at the 2013 Critical Race Studies in Education Association annual conference, Daniel Solórzano (2013), a founding theorist of CRT in Education shared impactful and sobering findings on the impact of racial discrimination amongst Communities of Color. In his talk, Solórzano addressed the then-recent passing of well-known activists, Cecilia Burciaga and Sol Castro. He then encouraged a room full of grieving CRT scholars to consider new pursuits that would expand our understanding of Critical Race Theory and bring about healing within communities of Color. This dissertation is a direct

30

response to that charge. However, I will need to utilize additional tools of Critical Race Theory to successfully carry out this research endeavor.

Expanding the Critical Race Theoretical Framework:

A growing body of research applies conventional scientific methods to the study of racialized risk factors and populations (Brondolo et al., 2009; Clark et al., 1999; Geronimus, Hicken, Pearson, Seashols, Brown, and Cruz, 2010; Mays et al., 2007; Szanton et al., 2012). These projects aim to explain relationships between racism and marked racial health disparities between whites and People of Color. Although this work advances our collective understanding of racism, it remains largely disconnected from the guiding tenants of CRT (Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010). Additionally, Adams and Salter (2010) have noted that a Critical Race Theory of Psychology has yet to be broadly utilized in conceptual or empirical work. However, as demonstrated throughout this paper, race-related stress represents an ongoing weapon against the well-being of People of Color and Black men in particular. According to CRT, these health disparities, a specific terrain of racism itself, will not be destroyed within a society predicated on antiblackness and white supremacy. We are indeed engaged in a protracted struggle of abolishing the current order in hopes of contributing to an entirely different world (Stovall, 2016). Key to this ongoing struggle is an informed strategy with more accurate appraisals of the actual depth and scope of the violence we are attempting to overgrow (Trochez, in preparation). CRT is an invaluable tool in this endeavor and should be applied across disciplines and spaces of knowing if antiracist educators, health practitioners, and psychologists truly desire to make manifest the fugitive dreams wherein racism (and its underlying logics) no longer exist (Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010).

Thus, in addition to CRT in Education, I also draw upon the burgeoning concepts of

Critical Race Theory as applied to Psychology and Public Health in an effort to offer Black men

at PWIs more robust tools to navigate the antiblack environments they occupy. In the following

section, I provide a brief description of the emerging themes of Critical Race Psychology (CRP)

and Critical Race Theory in Public Health (CRPH).

Critical Race Psychology:

As previously mentioned, the transdisciplinary nature of CRT challenges Psychology

scholars and students to adapt and employ a critical standpoint in our work. Adams and Salter

(2011) propose one possible path towards developing a Critical Race perspective within

Psychology (CRP). Although CRT has not yet been applied broadly, the authors contend that

Critical Race Theory can disrupt those conventions within the field of Psychology that have

supported inequitable racial power relations. To this end, Adams and Salter (2011) offer three

theoretical positions that may assist scholars, teachers, and students in establishing and applying

CRT in theory and practice:

1) **Race as Epistemological Position**: A Critical Race Theory of Psychology would eschew "colorblind" analyses of allegedly race-irrelevant topics. With an understanding that the social construction of race and racism remain central throughout the various domains of thought and behavior of individuals and groups, CRP would extend the conscious application of racially positioned knowledge to topics across psychological science.
2) **Identity Consciousness**: Like CRT, CRP requires "a greater degree of identity consciousness and critical reflexivity regarding the role of racial identity in the knowledge construction process" (Adams & Salter, 2011, p. 4). Traditional graduate training in the social sciences has encouraged students to disregard (or attempt to *control* for) their social identities and strive to conduct research as objective, socially positionless observers. In contrast, CRP argues that scholars adopt an identity consciousness position and question claims of post-racial or "colorblind" objectivity within research and practice.
3) **Critical Methodology:** Critical Race Psychology involves a critical stance toward standard methodological practices that "inject more identity-conscious, narrative modes of inquiry into standard methodological practice" (Adams & Salter, 2011, p. 5). Critical Race Psychology encourages researchers to expand their approach beyond experimental

methods and consider utilizing qualitative analyses (grounded in the experiential knowledge of participants) which ultimately "preserve and illuminate the ecological and historical context" (Adams & Salter, 2011, p. 5).

CRT has been utilized in several disciplines beyond its roots in jurisprudence, including Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 1997), Gender studies (Wing, 2003), and Psychology (Adams & Salter, 2010) amongst others. Public Health scholars (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010) recently developed the Public Health Critical Race Praxis model and offered discipline-specific foci and principles of Critical Race Theory. The emergence of CRT in Public Health (Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010) assists researchers in conducting studies on the social determinants of health and working simultaneously to dismantle the conditions that reinforce health disparities. Healthcrits accomplish this through:

1) A commitment to remaining conscious of dynamic and impact of race in society in their personal lives
2) Acknowledging the organization of society through constructed categories of race
3) Repudiating the ideology that racial health disparities stem from inherent biological differences while responding to the socio-political realities of racial inequity
4) Understanding the prevalence and ubiquity of racism in societal relations and institutions
5) Attuning their research focus to systemic level factors as catalysts in interpersonal race relations
6) Attending to the subjective nature of all knowledge production
7) Critically analyzing dominance in the self and society and advocating for justice
8) Exploring intersections between different forms of oppression (racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.)
9) Highlighting structural racial inequities within the field of Public Health
10) Centering the voices of marginalized People of Color in order to counter-act power dynamics that often privilege the perspectives of white people and institutions

These principles of PHCR and the broader organizing tenets of Critical Race Theory will enable me to examine the current predicament of Black men in higher education.

Literature Review

Black College Males:

While most racial/ethnic subgroups have seen significant progress in their postsecondary enrollment, there has been little to no progress in increasing participation rates among Black men

over the last quarter of a century (Dixon and Rousseau, 2005; Harper and Hurtado, 2007; Harper, Paton, and Wooden, 2009; Howard, 2013; Smith, Hung, and Franklin, 2012). Today, Black men represent the exact same proportion of all students enrolled in American colleges as they did in 1976 (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). Of approximately 15 million undergraduate students in the US, less than 5% are Black men (Strayhorn, 2008). Tinto's (1993) interactionalist theory of college student departure postulates that the extent and magnitude of a student's academic and social integration experiences are important predictors of their satisfaction with college, which, in turn influences their decision to persist in college. Tinto explained that retention is a function of the degree to which a student becomes academically and socially integrated or "tied" to campus life.

However, Black men who attend PWIs face significant obstacles when trying to establish meaningful home spaces on campus (Solórzano et al., 2000). Moreover, Black male students report feeling isolated and alienated on campus and turn to others for support (Fries-Britt and Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008). Upon entering college, Black males must negotiate a system that often assumes they are in need of academic remediation, are in college because they are enrolled in an athletic program, or are lacking in higher-order critical thinking skills (Brown II, 2002; Harper, 2012). Nonblack members at PWIs (like the broader society in which they are situated) tend to perceive treat all Black males as a monolithic and nonhuman group (Cuyjet, 2006; Steele, 2005). In a study of Black students at a large, research university, Sedlacek et al. (1998) found that many students perceived their instructors to be racist and were disappointed overall with the postsecondary educational experiences they had been afforded.

Black participants in a study by Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) identified and reflected upon the following problems they faced on their campus: (1) Negative comments and stereotypes

34

from instructors and non-Black peers about the African-American community (2) being forced to validate their intellectual competence in the classroom to white peers and instructors and (3) stereotypes about their personal appearance. Chism, Cano, and Pruitt's (1989) assertions provide additional insights into these claims: "Black students, for example, recount that instructors often assume that they are athletes, are surprised when they hand in well-written reports (Black students who write well are frequently suspected of plagiarism), and expect them to have come from inferior high schools" (1989, p. 28). Additionally, although Black students seek out leadership experiences and participate in honors programs with a high degree of academic ability, they are still judged by peers and faculty based on stereotypes (Fries-Britt and Griffin, 2007). These data point to the need for researchers to document, analyze, and provide avenues for Black males to resist everyday forms of racism.

A Theory of Microaggressions:

With Critical Race Theory as the foundational framework, I incorporate the tools of racial microaggressions to study of everyday racism. As previously mentioned, overt racist acts are usually not socially condoned and such examples in the public discourse are rare. However, it is in the private or semi-private conversations that everyday racism can exist in subtle and covert ways in the form of microaggressions. Chester Pierce first described these subtle forms of racism as offensive mechanisms in a 1969 chapter titled "Is Bigotry the Basis of the Medical Problem of the Ghetto?" Pierce (1969) helps us understand the origins and response to this phenomenon by stating:

> To be black in the United States today means to be socially minimized. For each day blacks are victims of white 'offensive mechanisms' which are designed to reduce, dilute, atomize, and encase the hapless into his 'place.' The incessant lesson the black must hear is that he is insignificant and irrelevant (p. 303). What is needed for example is a sweeping new theoretical concept…The poor black

35

may need care based on other models such as the negotiation of 'offensive mechanisms' (offenses done to him)… (p. 308).

In the 1970 chapter "Offensive Mechanisms," Pierce extends the concept of offensive mechanisms and first introduces the term microaggression. Pierce (1970) states:

Most offensive actions are not gross and crippling. They are subtle and stunning. The enormity of the complications they cause can be appreciated only when one considers that these subtle blows are delivered incessantly. Even though any single negotiation of offense can in justice be considered of itself to be relatively innocuous, the cumulative effect to the victim and to the victimizer is of an unimaginable magnitude. Hence, the therapist is obliged to pose the idea that offensive mechanisms are usually a micro-aggression, as opposed to a gross dramatic, obvious macro-aggression such as lynching (p. 265-66).

It is not until 1980 that Pierce explicitly uses the term racial microaggression. In the chapter "Social Trace Contaminants: Subtle Indicators of Racism in TV," Pierce (1980) tells us that:

The subtle, stunning, repetitive event that many whites initiate and control in their dealings with blacks can be termed a racial microaggression. Any single microaggression from an offender to a defender (or victimizer to victim) in itself is minor and inconsequential. However, the relentless omnipresence of these noxious stimuli is the fabric of black-white relations in America (p. 251).

Pierce doesn't use the term again in his writing until 2000 when he and his colleagues explicitly use race and microaggression in an encyclopedia entry on "Blacks, Stress in" (Profit, Mino, & Pierce, 2000). They state:

The chief energy demand on Blacks is how to recognize, evaluate, anticipate, and dispose of race-inspired microaggressions. These are automatic, subtle, stunning, seemingly innocuous messages, often non-verbal, which devaluate the Blacks; e.g. a Black man and a White man enter an elevator whereupon (p. 328) the single White female passenger clutches her handbag as she moves as close as possible to the White man. Microaggressions, the major and inescapable expression of racism in the United States, take a cumulative toll on Black individuals. As such they enter into the formation of Black group stress. What may be more important is that these cumulative, minor but incessant put-downs often remain as psychopollutants in the social environment. Their lingering intractability is a major contributor to the continuing traumatic stress suffered by Blacks as individuals and as a group (pp. 327-328).

Thus, racial microaggressions are one form of systemic everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place. Racial Microaggressions are: (1) verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward People of Color, often carried out in subtle, automatic or unconscious forms (2) layered assaults, based on a Person of Color's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname and (3) cumulative assaults that take a psychological and physiological toll on People of Color (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Racial Microaggressions and Black Males:

Black males experience microaggressions in the form of overt, racially derogatory statements or actions, derogatory graffiti scribbled on dormitory message boards, ethnic slurs hurled at them as they walk. Another common attack leveraged against Black men on PWIs is the assumption of criminality. This form of microaggression can be observed in the seemingly self-protective behaviors of non-Blacks who avoid walking past an on-coming group of Black men (Harper, 2009; Staples, 1986; Smith et al. 2007), the suspicious glares from campus safety officers who consistently require Black students to produce their university identification card (Harper, 2006; Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000), or the white women who quickly grasp their personal belongings whenever they step onto an elevator occupied by a Black person (Yancy, 2008). Another type of microaggressions frequently directed at Black men is the assumption that any and all Black male college students gained entrance into the university through athletic scholarships or an "unfair" affirmative action quota (Harper and Hurtado, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano and Allen, 2002).

The sheer amount of literature documenting the incessant deployment of racial microaggressions against Black college males further complicates the deficit frameworks that are often invoked when less-informed scholars wrestle with our retention and graduation rates

(Smith et al., 2007). The foundational and groundbreaking scholars who study Black males in education (Allen, et al., 1991; Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1985; Harper, 2006; 2012; 2013; Howard, 2008; Howard and Flennaugh, 2011; Milner and Howard, 2004; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano et al., 2002) have established that, rather than embodying failure, African-American males on PWIs exude great resiliency and resistance in the face of every-day racism (Smith, et al., 2007a). Unfortunately, such courage under fire is not expressed without consequence. As previously mentioned, those Black men who persist through graduation at PWIs, despite a prevalence of racial hostility, tend to suffer higher levels of stress-related health issues than any other racial-gender group on campus (Smith et. al, 2011). It is incumbent upon scholars in Education to document the impact of microaggressions on Black males and offer reliable methods of responding in ways that disrupt the potential damage.

Psychological Impact of Racial Microaggressions:

Scholars in Education (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, Carmona, 2012; Perez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Smith et al., 2007a; Smith et al., 2011; Solórzano et al., 2000) and Psychology (Brondolo et al., 2009; Brown and Tylka, 2011; Clark et al., 1999; Matthews, Hammond, Nuru-Jeter, Cole-Lewis, and Melvin, 2013; Pieterse, Todd, Neville, and Carter, 2012; Torres et al., 2010; Utsey and Payne, 2000) suggest that perceptions of racism are generally inversely associated with psychological well-being and positively associated with psychological distress amongst People of Color. For example, chronic exposure to racism has been associated with increased depression, feelings of loss, helplessness, and lowered self-esteem (Utsey & Payne, 2000). According to these studies, it appears that the potential psychological impact of race-related stress is in the eye (or mind) of the beholder (Szanton, Rifkind, Mohanty, Miller III, Thorpe, Nagababu, Epel, Zonderman, and Evans, 2012)

As previously mentioned, Black men's exposure to racial microaggression has been positively correlated with their attrition at PWIs (Harper, 2006; Harper, 2009). In addition to this material consequence, Solórzano et al. (2000) suggest that the subtle, ambiguous, constant, and cumulative nature of microaggressions lead to severe psychological consequences for their targets and constitute a potent form of race-related stress (Smith, Yosso, Solórzano, 2006). According to the seminal transactional stress and coping model, race-related stressors are unique and increase perceptions of general stress and eventually contribute to mental health problems (Berry, 2006). Utilizing a measure of racial microaggressions, Sellers (2006) found that this type of discrimination was related to poorer mental health among first year, African-American college students.

Unlike overt racism, microaggressions are *complex* stressors because their targets must cope with the psychological, emotional, and environmental penalties akin to a normal assault *and* simultaneously decipher the ambiguous motivation of the aggressor (Brondolo et al., 2009; Harrell, 2000). Thus, microaggressions represent a tangible stressor for Black males and can play a significant role in their psychological health given that they require constant cognitive recruitment of appraisals (of whether the event qualifies as a microaggression), evaluations (of the intention of the perpetuator), and coping mechanisms (how to respond) (Smith et al., 2006; Solórzano et al., 2000; Watkins, 2012). However, the manner in which microaggressions impact psychophysiological health of Black men along with the coping skills that can serve as protective factors are not well understood (Torres et al., 2010). Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF), a psychophysiological measure of acute stress grounded in Critical Race Theory, may be one possible framework that helps illuminate the role of racial microaggressions on the overall well being of Black men.

The Battle Fatigue Bridge:

Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2006) find that People of Color develop Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) through persistent exposure to microaggressions. RBF theory contends that the consistent racial confrontations faced by People of Color on PWIs (and other hostile spaces) drain them of their physical, psychological, and emotional resources (Smith et al., 2006, p. 301). In addition to traditional mental health disparities associated with microaggressions, RBF scholarship investigates a range of physiological responses to race-related stress. These include: headaches, grinding teeth, clenched jaws, chest pain, shortness of breath, pounding heart, high blood pressure, muscle aches, indigestion, gastric distress, constipation/diarrhea, increased perspiration, intestinal problems, hives, rashes, sleep disturbance, fatigue, insomnia, and frequent illness (Smith et al., 2011, p. 68). Researchers have found that the stress from racial microaggressions, "…become(s) lethal when the accumulation of [these] physiological symptoms of racial battle fatigue are untreated, unnoticed, misdiagnosed, or personally dismissed" (Smith et al., 2006, p. 301).

Consistent with the first tenant of Critical Race Theory, it seems that Black men are in a double bind. Access and obtainment of higher education are touted as meaningful pathways to greater economic stability and an assumedly less vulnerable position in society for Black men (cite). Thus, the retention of Black students through graduation is a reasonable concern for those interested in improving Black life. Simultaneously, Black men's incorporation into purposeful white space, whether within or beyond higher education, seems to correspond with their increased exposure to interpersonal manifestations of antiblackness and subsequently detrimental effects which may last (and ultimately cut-short) a lifetime (Bishop, 2017; Dumas and Moss, 2016; Smith et al., 2011).

Critical race researchers (Smith et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2011) have utilized RBF measures to identify, appraise, and challenge the deleterious impact of microaggressions on the achievement and health of Black students and other Students of Color. This important work expands the traditional framing of microaggression research by linking race-related psychological stressors with associated physiological stress responses. In so doing, RBF research offers more holistic and promising insight into the aforementioned double-bind dilemma of Black male collegians. With respect to the relationship between discrimination and health outcomes, researchers have primarily used instruments that measure more direct and overt forms of discrimination, thus potentially overlooking the subtler microaggressions (Torres et al., 2010; Watkins, 2012). The efforts of RBF research have pushed educational scholars to look beyond the psychological responses of People of Color to overt racism. However, it seems that this framework can be expanded in important ways.

For example, while RBF studies have incorporated some empirical quantitative designs that consider several physiological stress responses to microaggressions, (Smith, Hung, Danley, 2012), public health scholars have identified a need for additional research that examines associations between perceptions of racism and specific types of distress beyond self-reported measures (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Mays Cochran, & Barns, 2007; Pieterse et al., 2012; Torres et al., 2010). Moreover, CRT scholars in Education interested in the impact of racial microaggressions on the Black male body may benefit from an interdisciplinary engagement with race-related stress research within Psychology and Public Health. As Mays et al. (2007) observe:

> The challenge at this point, is to cleave together the literatures examining the upstream side of discrimination and health with its focus on behavioral, social, and psychological factors to those studying the downstream biological pathways

and molecular events that are proximal causes of the high rates of disease and disability amongst Black [men] (p. 205).

Physiological Impact of Microaggressions:

Racism has been implicated in the onset of several stress related diseases including hypertension, coronary heart disease, cancer, and cirrhosis of the liver (Clark et al., 1999). African-Americans continue to bear a disproportionate burden in disease diversity and morbidity (Geronimus et al., 1996). Additionally, as previously mentioned, Black cisgender men remain at risk for an early death and have the lowest life expectancy in the in the US (Geronimus et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2011). Tragically, the overall death rate of African-Americans in the United States today is equivalent to that of whites in America nearly 40 years ago (Williams and Jackson, 2005). These premature deaths arise from the broad spectrum of disorders which disproportionately impact Black communities, namely, cardiovascular heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. Although Blacks are predisposed to being poor, utilizing a CRT lens, we understand that these health disparities are not the result of poverty alone (Solórzano et al., 2000). Even when socioeconomic status is controlled for, there is still an excess of 38,000 deaths per year or 1.1 millions years of life lost among African-Americans in the United States (Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010).

Geronimus hypothesizes that Black health disadvantages reflect a process of biological "weathering" (1992; 2001). Weathering is theoretically constructed as being a physical consequence of structural inequality and racial discrimination. More specifically, the weathering hypothesis states that, "…the effects of social inequality compound with age, leading to growing gaps amongst Blacks and whites through young and middle adulthood" (Geronimus, 1996, p.10). According to Geronimus et al. (2006), African-Americans may be biologically older than whites of the same chronological age due to the cumulative impact of consistent exposure to race-

related stressors. Several recently developed measures of biological age seem to lend powerful support to the weathering hypothesis and may prove valuable in assessing and combating the impact of racial microaggressions on Black men.

McEwan (1998) developed the concept of allostatic load in order to assess the cumulative effects of chronic stress on the human body. As a summative measure of long-term exposure to stress, allostatic load is a useful tool for investigating the interaction between cognitive processes and physiological responses to stress and their possible role in human senescence (growing old) and mortality (Jackson, Knight, and Rafferty, 2010; Mays, et al., 2007; McEwan, 1998). The presence of allostatic load is determined by the interaction between exposure to chronic stress and the body's physiological need to maintain homeostasis. Specifically, allostasis is the internal processes the human body uses to achieve homeostasis when faced with chronic stressors. As chronic stress increases so do the body's responses leading to wear and tear, and an increased allostatic load.

An in-depth description of this complex biological process is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, for the sake of general comprehension, allostatic load can be observed within the colloquial "fight or flight" stress response that occurs when an individual experiences a challenge, demand, or perceived danger. This response operates through the engagement of several important regulatory systems found within the body; namely, the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, and immune system (Seeman, McEwan, Rowe, and Singer, 2001). McEwan (1998) argues that when chronic and excessive demands (i.e. chronic stress) are placed on these regulatory systems, they will experience significant "wear and tear," losing their capacity to respond effectively to the demands (McEwan, 2005). Allostatic load may then take a toll on the body and contribute to the

development or progression of a broad range of pathological processes including cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, carcinogenesis, and accelerated aging. This model can also be used to conceptualize the possible deleterious health effects of microaggressions and racial discrimination.

As a biological measure of race-based stress, allostatic load illuminates the ways in which unhealthy environmental stimuli 'get under the skin' of People of Color to cause negative health outcomes (Hertzman and Boyce, 2010). For example, African-Americans on PWIs face daily chronic and acute race-based stressors that repeatedly invoke biological challenges similar to the fight/flight response (Watkins, 2012). With overloaded human regulatory systems, Black males experience elevated levels of cortisol and other hormones (indicators of allostatic load), which in turn wreak havoc on their bodies (Geronimus et al., 2007). Geronimus et al. (2007) found that Blacks have higher mean allostatic load scores than do whites at all ages, and the differential in scores increases with age. This trend correlates with the inequitable disease disparities and early demise found throughout Black communities. In this way, the concept of allostatic load lends biological credence to the weathering hypothesis.

Black males face persistent, complex, and complicated barriers to healthy, successful, and just lifestyles. Thus, critical scholars and educators with a vested interested in their restoration and longevity must employ equivalently rigorous, unique, and holistic research methodologies (Cook, 2012). Considering the allostatic load scores of Black college males who exhibit variant levels of Racial Battle Fatigue and other psychological maladies may be one promising Critical Race pathway for merging the "up" and "down" streams of racial discrimination work, understanding the psychophysiological impact of microaggressions, and combating the double-bind dilemma of collegiate Black men (Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010;

44

Mays et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2007; Watkins, 2012). Additionally, innovative methods interrogating the length of telomeres may provide a nuanced perspective of the weathering impact of microaggressions at an even more intricate, bodily level.

Racial Microaggressions at the Cellular Level:

Telomeres are the stabilizing caps on chromosomes that protect human genetic data and make it possible for cells to divide (Epel, Blackburn, Lin, Dhabhar, Adler, Morrow, and Cawthon, 2004). They shorten with each cell division until at a certain point the chromosomes are no longer stable, and cells stop dividing (Epel et al., 2004). Given their role in maintaining the integrity of chromosomes, telomeres have been likened to the plastic tips at the end of shoestrings that keep the laces from unraveling (Mays et al., 2007). The metaphor takes on added meaning when one considers that damaged plastic tips on shoestrings are indicative of how old they are, just as the length of telomeres is inversely related to chronological age (Epel et. al, 2004). In fact, growing research indicates that telomere length is also inversely related to exposure to stressful situations and physiological activation. This is demonstrated through the very same biomarkers (elevated levels of cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine) associated with allostatic load (Epel, Lin, Wilhelm, Wolkowitz, Cawthon, Adler, and Blackburn, 2006).

As previously mentioned, the over-exertion of these biological stress processes serves as an indicator of allostatic load and may lead to greater levels of inflammation (given a reduction in cortisol's typical anti-inflammatory capacities) and oxidative stress. Oxidative stress is the process by which reactive oxygen species damage cellular components, including DNA and proteins (Geronimus et al., 2010). Oxidative stress is elevated in many diseases (hypertension, insulin resistance) and is considered a potential antecedent to the development of cardiovascular disease. Like other biological processes, increased oxidative stress has been linked to increased

psychological stress (Epel et al., 2004; Epel et al., 2006; Geronimus et al., 2010). Persistent exposure to chronic psychological stress elevates levels of regulatory hormones and oxidative stress, which collectively contribute to the development of disease and mortality amongst humans. This wear and tear on the body accumulates over the lifespan and is marked by the shortening of telomeres (Epel et al., 2006; Geronimus et al. 2006; Geronimus et al., 2010; Von Zglinick, 2002).

Thus, telomeres are a powerful biomeasure of stress-related (vs. chronological) aging and may be a potent tool in assessing the deadly impact of microaggressions on weathering down Black men (Geronimus et al., 2010). More specifically, because the excess morbidity and mortality experienced by Blacks stems from their persistent exposure to multifactorial stressors experienced over a lifespan, researchers might expect to see a faster rate of telomere shortening and higher allostatic load amongst this population, especially African-Americans who report hyper-vigilant coping with race-related stress (Geronimus et al., 2010). To this end, shorter telomere length has been associated with many chronic diseases known to have marked Black-white health disparities, such as hypertension, atherosclerosis, cirrhosis, and diabetes, as well as mortality (Cawthon, Smith, O'Brien, Sivathchenko, and Kerber, 2003). Additionally, in a wide population of race-related stress, Geronimus et al. (2010) found that Black women have shorter telomeres and experienced an accelerated biological aging of approximately 7.5 years compared with white women of the same chronological age.

According to Geronimus et al. (2010) the possibility that Black people experience weathering, "sets an ambitious research agenda requiring the identification of a measure of biological aging and, ultimately, a well-specified set of measurable environmental, material, and psychosocial stressors that have the potential to impact it" (p. 25). Utilizing telomere research

efforts to assess the psychophysiological impact of racial microaggressions may represent a modest empirical step towards accomplishing this and providing critical evidence for effective responses to microaggressions.

Appraisal, Coping, and Responses:

A visionary scholar, Dr. Chester Pierce operationalized the term microaggressions in 1970 and worked to refine the concept through impactful research over the past 40 years (see also Pierce, 1995; Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Wills, 1978). Much of Pierce's original insight remains relevant to our thinking today, as numerous scholars take up the task of investigating microaggressions. In his seminal work, Pierce provided practical advice to affected individuals, communities, and their advocates. He proclaimed, "The black must be *taught to recognize*…microaggressions and construct his future by *taking appropriate action* at each instance of recognition" (Pierce, 1974, p.520; emphasis mine). Although Pierce (1989) described the "…paramount importance that Blacks in any situation become aware of how to anticipate, assess, and counter microaggressions," he also recognized the tremendous amount of psychological energy expended on managing and negotiating microaggressions (p. 309).

Given the damaging impact of racial microaggressions and the prevalence of deficit narratives of Black challenges, several scholars have focused their efforts on exploring how Black college men respond to and cope with the "everyday invalidations" that often accompany student life on predominantly white colleges and universities (PWIs) (Harper, 2009; Harper, 2012; Solórzano et al., 2000). These lines of research suggest some Students of Color avoid being "pushed out" and successfully navigate the racist system of higher education and obtain a diploma.

Contemporary scholars in Education (Solórzano and Perez Huber, 2012) posit that it may be possible to draw from the wisdom of Dr. Pierce to distinguish healthy avenues and arsenals of responses to racial microaggressions. In fact, previous research (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012; Ledesma and Solórzano, 2013; Solórzano, Allen, and Carroll, 2002; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano and Perez Huber, 2012; Yosso, Ceja, Smith, and Solórzano, 2009) has considered the types and responses to microaggressions across educational domains. Drs. Solórzano and Perez-Huber (2012) expanded upon this work utilizing literature from throughout psychology, health, and education to describe the **context** and **type** of microaggression as well as the psychophysiological **effects**, varied **responses,** and associated **consequences** of the targeted individual(s) (see Solórzano and Perez Huber, 2012). They have offered a Model for Understanding Racial Microaggressions (see Figure 2A), crafted with Pierce's advice in mind.

Figure 2.1
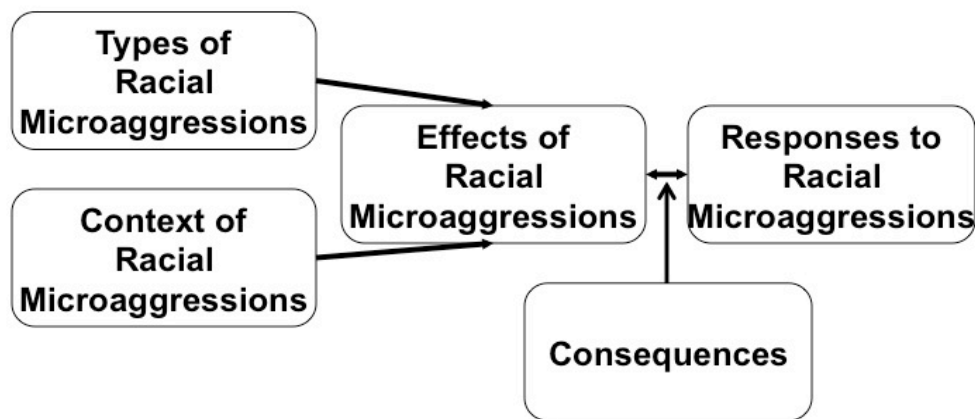
It is important to note that Solórzano and Perez-Huber operationalize the term "Responses" much in the same way that other fields that consider race-related stress consider "Coping." Additionally, while Solórzano and Perez-Huber describe "Effects," Psychology and Health refer to these phenomena as psychological and physiological "Responses." Thus, in utilizing

Solórzano and Perez-Huber's (2012) model, Educational research can now categorize and

explore the impact of various responses to racial microaggression amongst marginalized

participants. According to the model, when faced with everyday racism, Black students may:

1) Ignore the slight and deny that a moment of disregard happened
2) Internalize the microaggression and "self-police" their actions so as not to draw the ire of potential future perpetrators
3) Engage in hyper-vigilance in an attempt to "prove the microaggressor wrong" through their own non-stereotypical actions and hard work
4) Draw strength from similarly situated community members and rely upon "counterspaces" that challenge white supremacy, prepare them to deal with microaggressions, and affirm their identity
5) Engage in training, including Critical Race pedagogy, to further understand, analyze, and feel empowered by their resistance to microaggressions

These responses have been noted through self-report measures in qualitative studies in

Education. Related data regarding Black male responses to microaggressions suggest that

engaging in peer-to-peer relationships, counterspaces, and critical race pedagogy are among the

most healthy reactions to everyday racism on college campuses. Until this paradigm is utilized

more frequently in empirical research, education scholars (Solórzano and Villalpando, 1998;

Patton, 2006; Yosso et al., 2009) suggest counter-spaces as a viable pathway of combating

racial/gendered microaggressions.

The Power of Counter-Spaces:

Despite being relegated to the margins of higher education, Black males are often able to

re-structure their positions into powerful counter-spaces, which operate as affirming alternatives

to white hegemony (Harper and Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000;

Solórzano and Villalpando, 1998; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solórzano, 2009). These "counter-spaces"

serve as transformative locations wherein white supremacy is challenged and positive racial

identity development is encouraged (Solórzano and Villalpando, 1998). Students of Color who

access these spaces are more likely to form connections with similarly identified peers and

receive validation when they recount daily encounters with racial prejudice (Solórzano, et al., 2000). They also obtain academic encouragement from advanced peers; these characteristics seem unique to counter-spaces and align well with evidenced suggestions for increasing the retention rates of Students of Color (Harper, 2006a; Harper, 2012; Harper and Nichols, 2009; Harper and Quaye, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000).

The Importance of Transformational Resistance:

Although students who access counter-spaces are more likely to graduate from PWIs, additional positive psychological outcomes are associated with those Students of Color who are empowered to sharpen their responses to racial prejudice and engage in transformational resistance (TR). Transformational Resistance has been defined as liberatory action employed by People of Color who are conscious of the dynamics of structural oppression and remain deeply committed to social justice (Covarrubias and Revilla, 2003; Delgado-Bernal, 1997; Solórzano and Villalpando, 1998; Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001). People of Color engaged in TR can work in obvious *and* covert ways to fight against institutionalized racism and discrimination.

External TR is characterized by an awareness of systemic oppression and visible participation in social justice action that defies societal expectations and norms (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Thus, a Black student engaged in external TR understands that his university (like all PWIs) is built to serve white students. With this in mind, he may help organize members of the Black Student Alliance and openly challenge administrative leadership to increase structural diversity on campus. The quiet behavior of *Internal* TR appears to conform to dominant norms but is actually informed by a critique of inequality and distinguished by conspicuous social justice tactics (Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001). For example, a reserved, high achieving Black undergraduate who enrolls in an Ivy League Law program may

initially appear to be self-interested and focused solely on vocational and financial success. However, a closer examination will reveal that he is actually incensed by the disparate incarceration of Brown and Black communities and is conspiring to utilize jurisprudence to fight against institutionalized white supremacy. This student is exhibiting internal TR.

Students of Color are best prepared to engage in external and internal forms of TR when they are supported by transformational colleagues, mentors, role models, and agencies (Brayboy, 2005; Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Additional findings suggest Students of Color are often resilient, creative, and collaborative in the face of consistent oppression in predominantly white spaces. TR, therefore, is a powerful framework for understanding how, why, and when marginalized people, and Black men in particular, can utilize counter-spaces to work in healthy opposition against the very structures that oppress them.

Scholars have considered the extent to which social justice agencies (Covarrubias, 2003), mentors (Revilla, 2004), co-curricular affinity organizations (Harper and Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2006; Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001), and critical race pedagogy (Lynn, 2014) cultivate resistance in students. Those spaces that potentially inspire TR warrant further exploration given the gravity of Black male attrition and the potential positive impact of counter-spaces on their psychological, social, and academic well being. Contemporary research should investigate the potential of academic counter-spaces given the sporadically undesirable impact of some students' overreliance on co-curricular spaces (Patton, 2006; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998).While the Educational literature lauds counterspaces, peer-to-peer pedagogies, and Critical Race Pedagogy as psychologically healthy responses to microaggressions, the physiological and physical impact of such responses remains shrouded in uncertainty. Additionally, the

psychological literature on coping with race-related stress offers sometimes contradictory perspectives on how marginalized groups should respond to ambiguous forms of racism.

Coping According to Psychological Literature:

As previously mentioned, racist experiences have been associated with somatic complaints (headaches), negative affect, depression, and anxiety in college students of African descent (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002). Scholars in Psychology have also questioned what can be done to offset its deleterious repercussions (Miller, 1999). More specifically, some have argued that it is beneficial to examine this question using resilience (preserved psychological well-being) as a possible outcome as opposed to solely focusing on psychological distress (Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, and Williams, 2007). Resilience is "overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding the negative trajectories associated with risks" (Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005, p. 399). Focusing on resilience as a likely outcome suggests that Blacks could find meaning in their adversity and emerge from adversity with their well being intact. Garmezy, Masten, and Tellegen (1984) constructed a protective model of resilience suggesting that there may be factors that buffer individuals and impart a kind of immunity against stress.

The Psychological literature on coping mechanisms generally follows three types of coping strategies in response to race-related stress: (1) Racial Socialization/Racial Identity Development (2) Seeking Social Support and (3) Confrontation and Anger Expression. I discuss each response below. However, it should be noted that there are no population-based epidemiological data on the strategies most commonly used to cope with episodes of race-related maltreatment (Harrell, 2000). Additionally, the available research findings uplift sometimes contradictory and conflicting coping strategies as healthy.

Racial Socialization:

Researchers (Sue and Sue, 2008) note that Black people might be best served by internalizing an external locus of control and attribute their problems to racial barriers. This attribution may help Black people cope with racialized stress more effectively given its very real and pervasive power as an environmental toxin. However, other researchers (Hammack, 2003) are wary this externalizing may also encourage fatalism and a sense of helplessness amongst Blacks who believe that they have little to no power to change their environment. These researchers argue that while racial discrimination places Black people at risk for psychological distress many do not seemingly succumb to it and instead are resilient. What it means to "not succumb" to discrimination is less clear in these largely secondary analyses. Nevertheless, the fact of Black resilience (overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding the negative trajectories associated with risks) has led various researchers to articulate factors that contribute to Black people's ability to overcome distress from racial discrimination (Brown, 2008; Harris-Britt et al., 2007; Sellers and Shelton, 2003). Racial socialization may be one such factor.

Racial socialization involves various explicit and implicit messages that provide Black men with healthy methods for coping with the realities of racism and racial hostility (Bynum, Burton, and Best, 2007; Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, and Davis, 2002). These messages include the encouragement of cultural pride and the promotion of cultural knowledge, such as exposure to Black history and traditions. Caregivers, peers, and educators may also incorporate messages regarding the history and current state of racial oppression African-Americans have faced in *preparation for racism.*

Researchers have found a positive relationship between racial socialization and self-esteem (Stevenson et al., 1997), academic achievement (Caughty et al., 2002), and psychosocial functioning (Caughty et al., 2002; Scott, 2003; Steveson, 1997). There is growing evidence that racial socialization messages are associated with decreased negative psychological well being and increased positive well-being in African Americans (Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Addison, Cherry, 2000; Caughty et al., 2002; Coard and Sellers, 2005; Frabutt, Walker, & Mackinnon-Lewis, 2002; Stevenson et al., 2002). Bynum et al. (2007) revealed that African-American college students who reported that they had received messages to be proud of their culture also reported less depression, anxiety, somatization, and psychoticism. Receiving racial socialization messages has been found to be significantly related to resilience among Black college students (Brown, 2008).

Racial Identity Development:

Helms (1990) describes racial identity as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (p. 3.). Racial identity is distinct from ethnic identity (defined by Phinney as "the subjective sense of belonging, preference for the group, positive evaluation of the ethnic group, ethnic knowledge, and involvement in ethnic group activities") in that it entails a complex developmental process, reflecting the individual's attempts to resolve the problems associated with racism directed both at the individual and at the group as a whole.

Some aspects of racism may influence the salience of race-related maltreatment and affect the subsequent appraisals of and coping responses to these events (Oyserman et al., 2003; Quintana, 2007). For example, a well-developed racial identity may be associated with historical and experiential knowledge about one's own group and its social position. In turn, this knowledge may help a targeted individual distinguish between actions directed at the person as

an individual versus those directed at the person as a member of a particular group. This can protect targeted individuals from injuries to self-esteem or distress when they are exposed to negative events that may be a function of ethnic discrimination rather than individual characteristics or behavior (Seller and Shelton, 2003).

Fischer and Shaw (1999) noted that racial identity buffered the effects of everyday racism on depressive symptoms amongst a group of young, Black adults. In contrast, another study (Bynum et al., 2007) obtained positive main effects of racial identity on distress. These main effects analyses suggest that the pride and belonging dimensions of racial identity may produce a more general feeling of well being. However, the effects of these positive racial identity dimensions were not sufficient to offset the impact of perceived racism, and in particular, everyday maltreatment, on distress and depressive symptoms. Thus, the findings to date regarding a strong racial and/or ethnic identity as a potential buffer against the effects of racism on mental health/psychological distress have been conflicted (Brondolo, ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, Contrada, 2009).

Seeking Social Support:

Similar to counterspaces, Sarason et al. (1983) define social support as the presence or availability of network members who express concern, love, and care for an individual and provide coping assistance. Seeking social support within the Black community means seeking out and talking to others as a means of coping with racial discrimination. It is widely accepted that seeking social support is beneficial for physical and psychological health (Allgower et al., 2001; Symister and Friend, 2003). A supportive social network promotes a sense of security and connectedness, helping the individuals to understand that discrimination is a shared experience.

In a study on Black college students Swim et al. (2003) found that 68% of research participants discussed a racist incident with their family, friends, and others. Krieger (1990),

Krieger and Sidney (1996), and Mellor (2004) also found that the vast majority of Black individuals in their sample reported "talking to others" in response to racial discrimination. Although social support has been hypothesized to serve as an effective strategy for coping with racism, there has been limited empirical research testing or supporting this hypothesis (Brondolo et al., 2009).

Confrontation and Anger Expression:

Research regarding Blacks and race-related stress has found that suppressing anger in the face of discrimination is associated with higher levels of blood pressure or poorer cardiovascular recovery from race-related stress exposure (Brondolo et al., 2009). There is also evidence that amongst Blacks, expressing anger may be associated with poorer cardiovascular recovery as well. For example, Krieger (1990) found there to be less instances of hypertension diagnoses amongst Black women who would "do something about" racial discrimination, compared to those who would "accept it as a fact of life and keep quiet about it." Additionally, for African-Americans, blood pressure and heart rate recovery are slower when they are encouraged and allowed to express their anger regarding racial discrimination than when they were asked to inhibit it. This suggests that anger suppression exacerbates vascular recovery to stress for Blacks, perhaps because it may lead to rumination if issues are not resolved satisfactorily.

However, anger expression may lead to anxiety about retaliation or abandonment if social relations are threatened by direct expressions of anger. Although Blacks report trying to "do something" about racism (Krieger and Sidney, 1996; Plummer and Slane, 1996; Thompson Sanders, 2006), qualitative diary studies suggest that individuals report thinking about confrontation or indirectly or non-verbally expressing their anger more often than they actually engage in direct anger expression (Hyers, 2007). Moreover, if the strategies for confrontation and

anger coping are effective on some dimensions (e.g., reducing overt expressions of racism), but costly on others (e.g., social relations), individuals may not perceive themselves as having appropriate coping resources, making it likely that they will experience racial microaggressions as cumulatively stressful and distressing.

There is a significant need for further research on strategies for coping with racism. In fact, no coping strategy has emerged as clearly successful for offsetting the mental or physical health impacts of racism (Brondolo et al., 2009). Racism is a complex stressor, requiring a range of different coping resources to manage both practical and emotional aspects of the stressor. Features of the racist incident, as well as the corresponding coping demands, may vary depending upon the physical, social, and temporal context of exposure. Targets must cope with the substance of racism, such as interpersonal conflict, blocked opportunities, and social exclusion. They must also manage the psychological responses/consequences, including painful feelings of anger, nervousness, sadness, hopelessness, and their physiological correlates. Targets may also need to manage their concerns about short and long term effects of racism on other members of their group, including their friends and family members. Race-based maltreatment can occur in a number of different venues and the effectiveness of the coping response may vary depending on the context in which the maltreatment occurs. Within the context of higher education, more information is needed regarding how Black males should cope with racial discrimination.

Further investigation into biopsychosocial dynamics of everyday racism and Black collegiate men is warranted. The questions that guide my research are:

1) What are the potential inferences of relationships between a group of Black men's reported recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions at a PWI and their telomere length?

2) Which racial socialization messages and appraisals of racial microaggressions are utilized by Black collegiate men with varied telomere lengths?

a. What might we learn from the Black males' coping (response) strategies in light of their varied telomere lengths (consequences/long-term effects)?

The following chapter will review the methods used to successfully answer these questions.

Chapter 3

The Object of Black Studies

Methods and Plan of Study

I seek to understand which appraisal tendencies, coping mechanisms, and response strategies in the face of race-related stress correlate with more holistically healthful experiences amongst Black collegiate men. In order to address the research questions, a group of Black undergraduate men were sampled from the University of California, Los Angeles. This chapter will detail information about the sampling procedures as well as the methods utilized to explore the various lines of inquiry. This dissertation employs a mixed method approach, which is discussed in detail along with the theoretical lens guiding the questions, design, and planned analysis.

Theoretical Framework:

Critical Race Theory has been utilized in several disciplines beyond it roots in jurisprudence, including Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 1997), Gender studies (Wing, 2003), and Psychology (Adams & Salter, 2010) amongst others. Public Health scholars (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010) recently developed the Public Health Critical Race (PHCR) Praxis model and offered discipline-specific foci and principles of Critical Race Theory. The emergence of CRT in Public Health assists researchers in conducting studies on the social determinants of health and working simultaneously to dismantle the conditions that reinforce health disparities. Healthcrits accomplish this through:

1) A commitment to remaining conscious of the dynamics and impact of race in society in their personal lives
2) Acknowledging the organization of society through constructed categories of race
3) Repudiating the ideology that racial health disparities stem from inherent biological differences while responding to the socio-political realities of racial inequity
4) Understanding the prevalence and ubiquity of racism in societal relations and institutions

5) Attuning their research focus to systemic level factors as catalysts in interpersonal race relations
6) Attending to the subjective nature of all knowledge production
7) Critically analyzing dominance in the self and society and advocating for justice
8) Exploring intersections between different forms of oppression (racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.)
9) Highlighting structural racial inequities within the field of Public Health
10) Centering the voices of marginalized People of Color in order to counter-act power dynamics that often privilege the perspectives of white people and institutions

These principles of PHCR and the broader organizing tenets of Critical Race Theory will enable me to examine the current predicament of Black men in higher education.

Method:

Guided by a CRT lens, this study seeks to help educators, scholars, policy makers, and activists better understand how Black collegiate men experience, appraise, and cope with everyday racism. Additionally, social science research on racial discrimination has largely featured qualitative, self-report measures of psychological health. There is a dearth of information regarding the cumulative biological impact of or physically healthy responses to microaggressions. This cross-sectional study utilizes a two-phase transformative sequential mixed method design (TSMM) (Creswell, 2002) in an attempt to address this gap. TSMM studies seek social change on behalf of marginalized groups and are distinguished by strategically ordered phases of collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data (Mertens, 2009). A transformative paradigm addresses oppression that marginalized communities experience on individual and systemic levels. Mertens (2002) argues that four characteristics generally guide a transformative paradigm/method:

1) The lives and experiences of marginalized communities are placed at the center as knowledge holders; in turn, there is an acknowledgement that oppressed group's lives are constrained by the actions of oppressors
2) It analyzes how and why disproportionate power relation exist to create inequities based on gender, class, race, and/or sexuality

3) It examines how research in relation to inequities is associated with political and social action
4) It is grounded in transformative theory (i.e. Critical Race Theory) to examine why a set of beliefs exists or why a problem occurs

Sample:

Study participants were all US born, Black male undergraduate students aged between 18 and 26 years who do not have a serious or unstable disease (e.g., cancer, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis[12]). In order to better understand the biopsychosocial impact of racial microaggressions, I sought out a sample of 75 Black undergraduate men at UCLA with a desired yield of 50 participants. Nearly 3,400 Black students have enrolled at the purposively white university over the past three years and Black men constitute approximately 1.5% of the undergraduate population. Thus, 50 Black men represent 1/5th of the Black male population at UCLA.

I recruited a purposive sample of Black males who engage in distinct educational environments within the institution. More specifically, the sample includes a diverse group of men who are majoring in African-American studies, the physical sciences, other social sciences (Sociology, Psychology, Women's Studies, etc), and the humanities. I utilized various networks, worked with admissions officers, administrators, faculty, and cultural organizations to recruit participants. Each research participant received a $30 Amazon gift card for Phase I of the study and a $20 Amazon gift for participating in Phase II (see details about phases below).

Study Procedures Phase I:

During **Phase I** of the study, 44 Black undergraduates at the University of California, Los Angeles, were administered surveys and took part in the biospecimen data collection. All of the

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[12] These diseases complicate studies of general health and are typically controlled for in studies assessing telomere degeneration (Chae et al., 2014).

students come from a variety of majors, the majority of which are in the humanities and social sciences. The students are between 18 and 26 years of age and the majority are in their first two years of study on the Westwood campus. Participants met with the primary investigator in a private location in a non-clinical setting. Phase I procedures were: (1) a brief face-to-face interview assessing basic demographic characteristics (2) administration of the study questionnaire and (3) a self-administered buccal cheek swab (saliva sample) to obtain biospecimens for extraction of relevant DNA and assertation of participant telomere length.

Collection and Analysis of Biospecimens

Biospecimen collection occurred in 2017. I was familiar with the potential need to clarify misconceptions and address knowledge gaps regarding use of biospecimens in research that have been found previously in multiethnic groups (Dang et al. 2014). For example, I was prepared to answer basic scientific questions about the reasons for collection of the specific types of biospecimens needed, methods for collecting these, how they would be analyzed, and who would have access to them. The non-invasive nature of biospecimen collection was stressed. The kit included instructions for self-collection of biospecimens, a saliva collection tube, and a manila envelope for return of biospecimens. Written instructions for self-collection of biospecimens were provided in English and included illustrations to increase understanding of these instructions. For saliva collection, participants were asked to spit into a commercially available saliva collection tube (DNA Genotek), which was labeled with the same unique identifier. Participants met me in the morning and provided saliva samples.

I transported the collected samples to the Health and Equity Research (HER) Laboratory at San Francisco State University (SFSU). HER Lab director, Dr. Leticia Márquez-Magaña, and the HER Lab manager, Rebecca Mendez supervised and carried out the telomere measurements

as established by the Cawthon (2002) method. The DNA they obtained from participants' cheek cells in saliva Genomic DNA (gDNA) was extracted from buccal cells with the QiaAmp DNA blood mini kit (Qiagen) according to the manufacturer's recommendations and was used to establish and validate the telomere length assay[13]. Members of the HER laboratory and I corresponded frequently and I made several trips to SFSU during their arduous extraction of high-quality DNA and strenuous analysis of telomere length. Once we obtained telomere length results that were reproducible for each of the participants, I utilized the data to analyze their survey responses.

Survey Analysis

The "Race and College" survey includes demographic characteristics, questions regarding participants engagement in various types of campus-specific racial socialization experiences (including Black Student Alliance and other cultural organizations, McNair Scholars Programs, Black male retention and support programs, Black Greek organizations, Athletic teams, advocacy groups, etc.), and adaptations of the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS), the Major Events of Discrimination Scale (MEDS), and the Racial Battle Fatigue and College Scale (RBFS). These measures are purported to indicate general, ambiguous, and acute forms of racialized incidents respectively. Thus, collectively, they may constitute a compelling proxy for the various manifestations of racial microaggressions on PWIs. Instead of reporting holistic participant scores on the given measures, I discuss trends emerging from their responses to collapsed items of interest on the survey for the purposes of the study. I am concerned with drawing inferences for future research. Thus, I utilized SPSS to conduct a univariate analysis to

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[13] See Appendix A for the full assay process.

produce descriptive statistics on the participants responses to the Race and College survey stratified by telomere length.

Study Procedures Phase II:

Phase II of the study consisted of two semi-structured, focus group interviews with representative subsamples of the participants identified through Phase I. I reached out via email to all of the participants from Phase I who had successfully completed the survey and telomere process, inviting them to participate in a focus group to further discuss campus racial experiences. Each focus group featured 5 participants (10 total focus group participants).

Focus Group Analysis

After interviewing these men, I transcribed and analyzed their responses as data. I then compared and coded these interviews with themes from the existing literature regarding the experiences of Black men and microaggressions employing Creswell's (2007) suggested steps for qualitative data analysis. This includes: (1) Creating a listing of important statements from each interview (2) Creating a description of the "what" or the "textural description" of the experience (3) Building on the list of important statements by sorting these into themes (4) Creating a description of the experience, including the "how" of the participants' journey; this also includes the "structural description" (Creswell, 2007; p 0.159) and (5) Constructing a description that incorporates both the textural and structural, sharing the experiences as perceived. The textural description includes "significant statements and themes." The "context and setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007). Throughout this process of collecting, analyzing, and coding the qualitative data, I revisited the literature and collaborated with my participants to triangulate and integrate the findings with the results from Phase I.

Revisiting the Rationale:

I am utilizing a Transformative Sequential Mixed Method in order to address the research questions. This study is the first of its kind in the field of Education and we may benefit from a range of potentially exploratory and explanatory data. The ordered phases of the TSMM enable the researcher to consider and compare multiple forms of data with an increasingly informed and holistic lens. The rationale for each phase of the study is included below. Additionally, Table 3.1 includes a visual reference of the theories and methods guiding my approach to the various research questions.

1. What are the potential inferences of relationships between participants' reported recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions and their telomere length?

Rationale 1:

Several scholars have documented the experiences of Black men within historically white post-secondary environments (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2004; Harper, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000; Solórzano, Allen, Carroll, 2002). Although it is clear that these students do not constitute a monolith (Harper and Nichols, 2008; Howard and Reynolds, 2013; Strayhorn, 2013), several shared realities seem to cut across their variance in ethnic, sexual, social, political, and socioeconomic identity. More specifically, the majority of germinal (Allen, Epps, and Haniff, 1991; Allen, 1992, Cheatham, 1986; Fleming, 1985; Sedlacek and Brooks, 1987) and contemporary studies in Education (Harper and Harris III, 2010; Howard and Reynolds, 2013; Smith et al., 2007; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, and Lynn, 2004) suggest that Black male students at PWIs are consistently besieged by racial discrimination as they move hostile campus climates. Within these environments, Black men have to navigate ambiguous and insidious manifestations of racism (Solórzano et al., 2000). In light of this phenomenon, scholars in Education (Smith et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2011) and Psychology (Mitchell, 2011; Torres et al.,

2010; Watkins et al., 2010) have tracked the impact of microaggressions on the mental health of Black men. Empirical studies have confirmed that the "everyday racism" of microaggression qualifies as a potent form of race-related stress in the lives of Black men during and after their time on PWIs.

However, despite the unanimity of these findings within Education and Psychology as well as 20 years of inquiry validating the underlying assumptions of the biopsychosocial model of human health (Clark et al., 1999), there is a lack of empirical synthesis regarding the relationship between individuals' ability to recognize racism and their long-term health. Colleagues in Neuroscience (Wyatt, Myers, Williams, Kitchen, Loeb, Carmona, and Presley, 2002), Public Health (Epel et al., 2004; Geronimus, Hicken, Keene, and Bound, 2006) and Social Epidemiology (Chae et al., 2014; Williams, Neighbors, and Jackson, 2003) have attempted to address this gap by conducting research that explores the potential biological and physical consequences of social ills. A growing number of these individuals have collaborated with social scientists in Sociology and Psychology to pioneer innovative studies utilizing biological markers, such as telomeres, to track the cumulative impact of social stress on the body (Chae et al., 2014, McEwan, 2007).

A seminal study found a correlation between the stress experienced by mothers of autistic children and premature degeneration of telomeres (Epel et al., 2004), indicating their accelerated biological aging. The Observer (2014), the flagship magazine of the Association for Psychological Science, featured the relatively new body of research on telomere degeneration and lauded the area of study as the next important direction of scholarship for Psychology. This research is promising in exploring and potentially discovering causal pathways between the racial microaggressions (experienced as race-related stress) endured by successful Black

collegiate males and their lowered life expectancy. However, only four published studies to-date have tested the rate of telomere degeneration amongst Black males; finding a relationship between recognized experiences with racial discrimination and accelerated degeneration (Chae et al., 2014). Additionally, despite collaborative scholarship across social and physical science disciplines, none of the current research on telomeres has considered the specific context of educational environments. Finally, although several articles that measure the impact of stress on telomeres, mention race-related stress, there are no known research studies that disaggregate the potential impact of ambiguous, persistent microaggressions on telomere degeneration. Given this paucity in our understanding, I utilize quantitative methods to explore potential inferences of relationships between racial microaggressions experienced by a group of Black collegiate males and their average telomere lengths.

2. What racial socialization messages and appraisals of racial microaggressions are utilized by Black collegiate men with varied telomere lengths?

Rationale 2:

As previously mentioned, scholars have lauded that certain racial socialization messages and appraisal processes regarding microaggressions are linked to positive psychological outcomes amongst Black people. However, the broader racial stress literature paints a more complicated picture of preparation and attribution. Several strands of research (Pieterse, et al., 2012; Stevenson, 2015) report positive outcomes associated with early caretakers sending formative messages that intentionally empower their Black children to recognize and guard against racism. Other work suggests Black children who are encouraged to be vigilant in preparation for racism are likely to become hopeless and despondent adults (Lee and Hicken, 2016). The closely tied research on racism appraisal is hampered by a similar lack of agreement amongst scholars. This research on "perceived racism" often finds that in comparison to less

race-sensitive individuals, those who register ambiguous negative events *as racism* are more likely to become depressed and hypervigilant. Yet, Chester Pierce's (1970) work and its modern-day empirical adherents (Carrol, 2015; Smith et al., 2011; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano and Perez-Huber, 2015) offer evidence, also by way of self-reported psychological outcomes, that accurately recognizing racism is critical in sustaining one's health. This disagreement remains problematic as Black males (and other marginalized students) endure persistent attacks on their dignity. In response, I conducted and draw from the two telomere-based focus group data to obtain a better understanding of how a group of Black men internalized their racial preparation and how they encounter and decipher (i.e. recognize[14]) racial microaggressions.

2a. What might we learn from the Black males' coping (response) strategies in light of their varied telomere lengths (consequences/long-term effects)?

Rationale 2a:

The scholarship regarding coping strategies in response to racism also lacks cohesion. For example, several entries in the racial stress literature have uncovered strong correlations between expressions of poorer mental health (i.e. anxiety, depression, paranoia, etc.) and so-called "hypervigilant" coping mechanisms such as anticipating and avoiding everyday racial discrimination (Lee and Hicken, 2016). Other empirical work suggests these responses (or dispositions) help stave off the negative physiological outcomes associated with racial stress (Smith, Hung, and Franklin, 2011). Further complicating these findings are contradictory research paradigms that laud the health benefits (and decry the negative health outcomes) of

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[14] I use the term "recognize" instead of "perceive" in regards to encountering and deciphering racism. I understand that part of the impetus behind the "perceived" racism work includes a mindful championing of a phenomenological approach to studying racism. Some scholars (Harrell, 2000) thus uplift "perceived" racism in resistance to dominant voices who would rather tether the determination of the presence of absence of racial harm to an evidence presence or absence of malevolent racist intention. I hope this study addresses the potential and pitfalls of this approach. My "recognition" nomenclature emanates from the underlying Critical Race Theoretical frameworks that serve as a foundation for this study. Race and racism (including everyday manifestations) are prevalent and relatively permanent in a space saturated by and predicated on antiblackness.

anger expression compared to denying and ignoring racism (Pieterse, et al., 2012). Moreover, racial stress coping research in its most current and updated manifestations continues to frame responses to racism through "adaptive" and "maladaptive" lenses (Williams, 2016). After analyzing data regarding questions 1 and 2, I utilize combined insight from the participant telomere length and focus group conversations in order to more reliably investigate possible physical health outcomes associated with various coping (response in Solórzano and Perez-Huber's 2012 model) mechanisms. This process is rooted in the TSMM approach wherein ordered and organic phases are self-influencing. There has been no large-scale social epidemiological study regarding the impact of race-related coping mechanism on physical health (Brondolo, ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, and Contrada, 2009). This mixed method approach may provide scholars across Education, Psychology, and Health with a more holistic understanding of how Black men should respond to everyday forms of oppression.

Table 3.1

Research Question	Theory	Method	Analysis
1. What are the potential inferences of relationships between participants' reported recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions and their telomere length?	Critical Race Theory in Education and Critical Race Public Health Theory	*Phase I:* *Quantitative Method*: a. Demographic Characteristics b. Telomere extraction c. Race and College (Microaggression) Survey	Utilizing SPSS to conduct a univariate analysis to produce descriptive statistics on the participants' responses to the Race and College survey stratified by telomere length.
2. What racial socialization messages and appraisals of racial microaggressions are	Critical Race Theory in Education;	*Phase II:* *Qualitative Method*: Two semi-structured focus group interviews. I will conduct 2 organized	Record, transcribe, and analyze focus group responses as data. Compare

utilized by Black collegiate men with varied telomere lengths?	Critical Race Psychology	by telomere length findings from Phase I	and code themes along with existing literature. Analyze potential relationship between rate of telomere degeneration and internalization of racial socialization and appraisals of racial microaggressions.
2a. What can we learn from Black males' coping processes and response strategies in light of their rate of telomere shortening?	Critical Race Theory in Education; Critical Race Psychology	*Phase II: Qualitative Method*: Two semi-structured focus group interviews. I will conduct 2 organized by telomere length findings from Phase I	Record, transcribe, and analyze focus group responses as data. Compare and code themes along with existing literature. Analyze potential relationship between rate of telomere degeneration, impact of microaggressions, and coping strategies.

Positioning the Self and the Study:

I intentionally explored these questions through a Critical Race lens and provide an analytical discussion of the related findings informed by CRT in Psychology, Public Health, and Education. These lenses challenge claims of neutrality and objectivity. Relatedly, I am aware of and embrace my positionality as a Black male situated in purposively white spaces of higher education wherein I endure everyday racism. James Baldwin (1961) once said that to be Black and relatively conscious in the United States is to be in a place of rage all of the time. Accordingly, the current research and analysis of findings emanates from the indignance I experience in observing the effects of antiblackness on Black family members, friends, students, and familiar masses who are also exposed to mundane racial violence. Given my positionality and commitments, I recognize I am an invested investigator conducting research in order to contribute to the protracted war for the liberation of Black minds, bodies, and souls from a structural arrangement predicated on our ongoing captivity. Also aligned with Critical Race

Public Health Praxis, I am interested in understanding how racism as a toxic stressor is embodied in individuals and contributes to health disparities (Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010). I utilize methods that may help us better understand this structural (racial) reality and simultaneously lift up Black voices and experiences in the process. Importantly, the concept of racial permanence is interwoven in the guiding assumptions of questions and analysis.

Derrick Bell (1992) and other scholars (Hartman, 1997; Spillers, 1987; Wilderson, 2016) have argued that because chattel slavery and colonization operated as the animating lifeforce of the United States, contemporary "…racism serves an important stabilizing function in a society that is built on [stolen] property" (morgenr, 2012, March 8). Given the entrenched and endemic nature of racism, it is reasonable to expect tangible encounters with its active and residual components in any endeavor to corroborate and combat its impact (Bell, 1991; 2004; Harris, 1993). Indeed, antiblack racial disparities characterize nearly every metric of social welfare (Williams and Mohammad, 2009). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, the prevalence of microaggressions against Black students at PWIs is also well documented.

Thus, the present research questions and findings are not centered on whether or not UCLA constitutes a racially microaggressive environment for Black undergraduates. Such questions are rendered redundant in light of the antiblack history of US university systems as a whole (Dancy, Edwards, and Davis, 2018; Mustaffa, 2017; Ross, 2016) as well as the UC Regent's documented hostility towards more than one Black scholar activist (Marquez, 2014), its ambivalence concerning Black enrollment (outside of select athletic competitions) (Kory, 2006), and numerous empirical and intuitive testimonies of more than a few "Black Bruins" (Stokes, 2013). Additionally, numerous studies (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2004; Tourangeau and Yan 2007) suggest that People of Color are likely to *under*report interpersonal experiences with racial

discrimination. Conversely, other veins of social science research tend to confine the vitality, harm, and very existence of a racial hierarchy to the whims of individual perception (Combs, Penn, Cassisi, Michael, Wood, Wanner, and Adams).[15] Thus, rather than confirm the always already presence of racism at a purposively white intuition situated within a larger antiblack, settler colonial society (Dancy et al., 2018; Wilderson, 2016; Tuck, Guess, and Sultan, 2014; Tuck and Yang, 2012) I seek a deeper understanding of how the health outcomes within a group of Black men may be differentiated by the degree of their recognition, coping, and responses to the noxious psychopollutants they are exposed to everyday.

Considerations:

It is worthwhile to share the relevant methodological boundaries that impacted my investigative approach and the subsequent impressions I plan to communicate through the analysis. Given the paucity of telomere and race research in education (and most other fields), the present study is serving as an initial pilot for future investigations into the impact of everyday racism on the health of Black men and other People of Color. Several considerations and limitations may impact the findings of this study. For example, social epidemiological studies of racial health disparities have established that racism operates at numerous socioecological levels. It is therefore incumbent upon researchers to consider these multiple levels in designing their studies. Racial microaggressions can be understood as functioning at the interpersonal level, between individual perpetrators and targets who perceive discrimination (Jones, 2000). In this

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[15] To clarify, the work I reference here and similar psychological studies in Chapter 2 are rarely invested in the psychological triangulation of authentic sociological phenomena. Nor is it concerned with discerning validation between Black people who are able to accurately identify the presence and name the impact of racism and those who are not. On the contrary, "perceived racism" scholarship is often distinguished by its ahistorical, neutral, and positivistic stance. Knowingly or unwittingly, the tendency of the work obscures the social fact of antiblackness and allows more conscious *perceivers* of its toxic effects to be interpretively mutated into paranoid over-worriers relative to their veiled counterparts.

way the present study may appear to be limited in scope. However, it is also possible to investigate the uniquely racialized, contextual characteristics of PWIs as Black males navigate these spaces. I attempt to measure the contextual racism of PWIs through the responses of a purposive cohort of Black men who, through their academic discipline, may occupy differentially racialized spaces on campus. Moreover, in obtaining information through the questionnaire and eventual focus group interviews with a subsample, I may better understand if Critical Race Pedagogy, Counter-spaces, and Black male peer-to-peer relationships mediate the impact of PWI-based racial microaggressions. As mentioned earlier, each of these characteristics are lauded as leading to psychologically healthy outcomes for stressed Black males. Despite this plan, it may be difficult to truly understand the levels of exposure to racism at PWIs without additional information regarding Black men who do not attend PWIs. Moreover, despite my plan to control for socioeconomic and other health-related covariates in my analytical model, there may be additional unmeasured constructs that might make it difficult to discount alternative explanations.

Response bias represents another challenge. Given normative endorsements of the sociopolitical ideology of colorblindness, the ambiguous nature of microaggressions, and the hidden, complex processes of racism, individual perceivers (as well as researchers) typically underestimate its presence and impact (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). The Race and College Survey I am utilizing is largely informed by the Everyday Racism Scale (EDS) (Williams, 1997). The EDS is uniquely constructed with the specific purpose of helping participants more effectively document the aversive and innocuous aspects of racism they may experience.

Still, survey and telomere studies may be insufficient in inferring a potential relationship between recognitions of racism and biological gradients given the cross-sectional design of the

study. For example, it is possible that worse health associated with shorter telomeres could result in greater perceptions of racial discrimination. Interviews with study participants will address their specific experiences of microaggressions on campus and may help establish greater temporality between exposure to discrimination and telomere length.

I recruited 75 Black male undergraduates with a desired yield of 50 participants for the purposes of exploring the study questions. Forty-seven young men completed the survey and provided biospecimens. However, the study features 44 participants due to complications that disqualified the responses of three individuals from inclusion in the analysis. One individual was outside of the age range for the current study and two others did not complete enough items on the survey. We nearly met our desired yield despite the exclusion of these three participants as well as the warranted historical and contemporary challenges inherent in recruiting Black individuals for university-sponsored, biological research. Additionally, the eligible participants collectively constitute approximately $1/5^{th}$ (19.5%) of the Black male undergraduate student population at UCLA; a potentially sobering statistic depending on the extent of one's investment in the strategy of incorporation/occupation of Black people into purposively white spaces for larger justice goals. Moreover, the participants in the study are the third largest cohort of Black men to offer primary biodata with telomere length as the variable of interest. Given the apparent dearth of holistic understanding, the information shared by the young men could be considered compelling. I do not, however, include multivariate analyses with implications for significant relations given the smaller sample size and low cell count (less than 5 in most instances). Naturally, I do not attempt to make population-based claims based on the available data. Instead, I am concerned with potential inferences of relationships for future research and report descriptive information about and between the individual cases in the sample.

Thus far, the majority of telomere studies have featured cross-sectional comparisons of large secondary datasets with previously consented older adults or young children (including infants). The study is also unique in its inclusion of individual and focus group qualitative data, providing an important intervention in telomere research on racial discrimination that centers marginalized, Black voices. The study may indeed be a novel entry into the annuls of research in higher education, Black men, and biomarkers of accelerated aging.

However, despite important gains in telomere research over the past few years, biomarkers are relatively novel and may tell us more or less about the causal pathway of race-related stress than we can presently comprehend. More specifically, the cross-sectional design of this study limits inferences regarding the causal direction of associations. Finally, the purposive cohort sampling of high achieving Black males limits the extent to which potential findings can be generalized to African-American men and other People of Color in different geographic locales. Despite these caveats, the proposed study comes at a critical time for educators, scholars, and African-Americans throughout the educational pipeline. Black families continue to place considerable faith in the system of education for their children's success (Smith et al., 2011). Studies consistently find Black males at risk and constantly besieged by a systemic attack of racial microaggressions within predominantly white college environments (Harper, 2006a; Harper, 2012; Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano, et al., 2000).

Consistent with Critical Race Theory as well as the impetus for this study, it seems that Black men are in a double bind. Access to and obtainment of higher education may provide a meaningful path to greater economic equity and an assumedly less vulnerable position in society for Black men; thus, the retention of African-Americans through graduation is of paramount concern for racial justice advocates. However, Black men's entrance into "white space," whether

within or beyond higher education, seems to correspond with their increased exposure to elusive forms of racism that carry detrimental effects which may last (and ultimately cut-short) a lifetime (Smith et al., 2011). While researchers, educators, health professionals, encourage Black men to access counterspaces, critical pedagogy, and peer networks that exist on the margins of higher education, we know less about the extent of the damage of racial microaggressions in higher education. We are even less aware of proven strategies that assist Black men in appraising, responding, and coping with racial microaggressions. The present research study may help equip these men with the necessary tools to better understand this battle and continue fighting in a healthy manner.

Chapter 4

Got Power, Poison, Joy and Pain Inside my DNA:

Phase I Findings

Anti-Blackness is the genome of electoral politics...[it] is the genetic material of this organism called the United States of America- Frank Wilderson, 2016

The following chapter details the findings and analysis related to the investigation of the biopsychosocial impact of racial microaggressions on the lives of Black men. I utilize a transformative sequential mixed method combining quantitative and biological data offered by 44 Black undergraduate men in order to better understand the potential health implications of their recognition of mundane racial trauma at the purposively white institution (PWI) they attend. The first question of the study is:

1. What are the potential inferences of relationships between participants' reported recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions and their telomere length?

Roadmap to Study Findings

As previously mentioned, 44 Black undergraduates at the University of California, Los Angeles, were administered surveys and took part in the biospecimen data collection. Ten individuals recruited from this larger pool of eligible respondents, participated in two focus groups (five in each focus group). All of the students come from a variety of majors, the majority of which are in the humanities and social sciences. The students are between 18 and 26 years of age and the majority are in their first two years of study on the Westwood campus.

The data presented in the following chapter were gathered from the participants who successfully completed both components of Phase I (N=44). These students provided biospecimens (saliva) for DNA extraction and telomere analysis by the Health Equity Research Lab (HER) at San Francisco State University *and* responded to the Race and Campus Stress Survey (RCSS). In the present chapter, I first share findings related to participant relative

telomere lengths (TL), potential biological indexes of cellular health and overall longevity. Participant relative TL was obtained utilizing methods detailed in the previous chapter and are arranged onto a two-tiered scatter plot (see Figure 4.2 on pg. 8). I provide a detailed account of this arrangement process and contextualize consequential and somewhat urgent concerns given the broader scholarship pertaining to telomere length. I then further describe the two-tiered participants through an overview of several pertinent demographic data points detailed in Table 4.8 on pg.17.

Next, I offer a descriptive analysis of participants' relative TL cross-tabulated with their responses to key items on the RCSS (see figures on page 21). I present and analyze the combined data in this way in order to better understand potential inferences of relationships between the degree of individual participants' embodiment of quotidian antiblackness and relative recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions. As previously mentioned, the RCSS includes items derived from the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS), the Major Events of Discrimination Scale (MEDS), and the Racial Battle Fatigue and College Scale (RBFS). These measures are purported to indicate general, ambiguous, and acute forms of racialized incidents respectively. Thus, collectively, they may constitute a compelling proxy for the various manifestations of racial microaggressions on PWIs. Instead of reporting holistic participant scores on the given measures, I discuss trends emerging from their responses to collapsed items of interest on the survey for the purposes of the pilot study. Aligned with the Transformative Sequential Mixed Method approach, this chapter concludes with a brief account of the progress obtained in addressing Question 1 through the methods of Phase I as well as the subsequent queries and considerations that inform my engagement with Questions 2 and 2a during Phase II detailed in Chapter 5.

Black Men and Telomere Length

Question 1 is: What are the potential inferences of relationships between participants' reported recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions and their telomere length? In order to address this question, I must first establish the relative telomere length amongst the participants. Thus, in the section below, I discuss:

1) Participant Telomere Length
2) The Two-Tiered Arrangement of Participants
3) Comparative Causes for Concern

Participant Telomere Length:

Recall that telomeres are DNA-based protein structures that cap the ends of human chromosomes (Price, Kao, Burgers, Carpenter, and Tykra, 2012). Akin to how an aglet keeps the fibers of a shoelace from unraveling, telomeres are tips that prolong chromosomal integrity during cellular replication by enduring depreciative damage as cells divide. This process is illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1
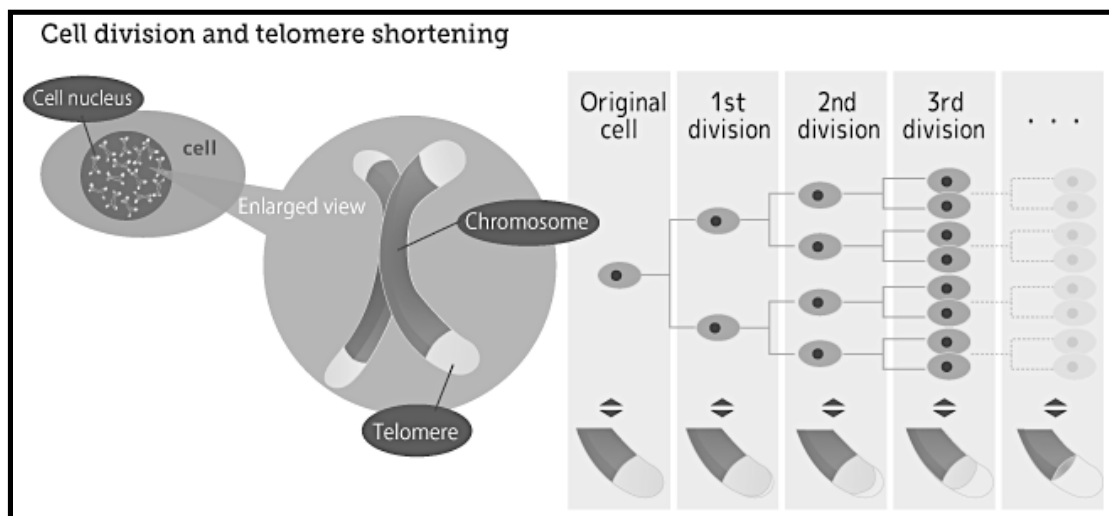
Participants' relative telomere length (T/S), obtained from their genomic DNA samples, was quantified by qPCR[16] and measured as a continuous variable by content and process experts in the Health Equity Research Laboratory (HER) at San Francisco State University as described in the previous chapter. The range of participant telomere length and subsequent arrangements are included in the Tables 4.1-3 below (p.7-8). Additionally Figure 4.2 on page 8 details the participants in the study by this relative telomere length.

Table 4.1

Black Men and TL- All Cases

0.166,0.532,0.572,0.729,0.756,0.841,0.885,0.914,0.945,0.955,0.957,0.966,0.969,1.01,1.03,1.05,
1.06,1.08,1.12,1.12,1.129,1.14,1.21,1.28,1.34,1.34,1.34,1.42,1.53,1.54,1.54,1.555,1.56,1.63,1.6
8,1.72,1.843,1.86,1.864,1.884,1.91,1.931,1.936,2.02

N= 44
Mean= 1.27
Median= 1.17
Range= 1.85
Mode= 1.34 (appeared 3 times)
Largest= 2.02
Smallest= 0.16
Sample Standard Deviation, s = 0.44
Variance (Sample Standard), s2 = 0.19

Table 4.2

Relatively Long TL: X= ≥ 1.5

1.53,1.54,1.54,1.555,1.56,1.63,1.68,1.72,1.843,1.86,1.864,1.884,1.91,1.931,1.936,2.02

N= 16
Mean= 1.75
Median= 1.78
Mode= 1.54 (appeared 2 times)
Largest= 2.02
Smallest= 1.53
Sample Standard Deviation, s= 0.17
Variance (Sample Standard), s2= 0.03

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[16] A widely used process established by Cawthon, 2002.

Table 4.3

Black Men and Relatively Short TL: X= ≤ 1.49
0.166,0.532,0.572,0.729,0.756,0.841,0.885,0.914,0.945,0.955,0.957,0.966,0.969,1.01,1.03,1.05, 1.06,1.08,1.12,1.12,1.129,1.14,1.21,1.28,1.34,1.34,1.34,1.42
N= 28
Mean= 0.99 (less than the average of Breast Cancer Survivors)
Median= 1.02
Mode= 1.34 (appeared 3 times)
Largest= 1.42
Smallest= 0.166
Sample Standard Deviation, s= 0.27
Variance (Sample Standard), s2= 0.07

Figure 4.2

Black Men and Telomere Length (N=44)

Relatively Long TL ≥ 1.5 = 36% (N= 16)

Relatively Short TL ≤ 1.49 = 64% (N= 28)
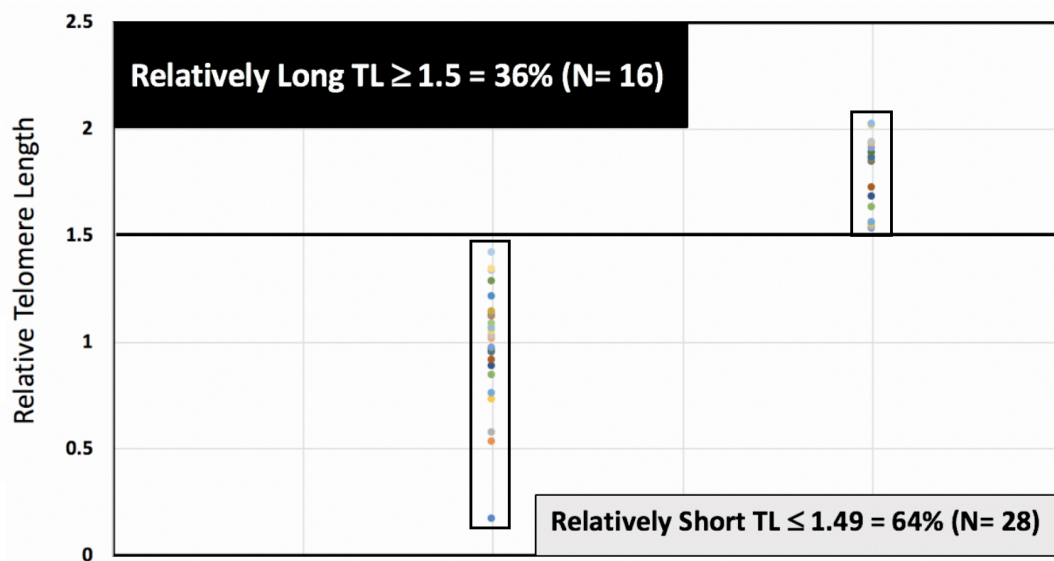
Two-Tiered Arrangement and Process:

The units of measurement in Tables 4.1-3 and Figure 4.2 represent the amount of telomere product (T) normalized by the amount of single gene product (S) T/S Ratio = Relative TL. The amounts of telomere and single gene products were determined for each participant using qPCR.. The relative telomere lengths for the 44 participants ranged between 0.16 and 2.01. Their sample mean was 1.27. The students are distinguished by their TL, and were arranged on

two tiers of relatively long or relatively short T/S ratios. The majority of participants, 28 (64%), have relatively short telomeres while the remaining 16 (36%) participants have longer relative telomeres. It is important to contextualize how participant telomere length is obtained and reported.

The overall process for stratifying participants into two-tiers of relatively long or relatively short TL began with saliva collection and ended with data analysis. At the suggestion of HER lab collaborators, participants in the present study collected their own saliva samples using Oragene kits from DNA Genotek. Once the biospecimens were collected and transported to SF State, HER lab collaborators established relative TL for each participant employing the very same laboratory equipment and assay utilized in previous telomere-centric investigations[17]. Upon receiving participant TL findings from the HER lab in scatterplot form, I worked alongside my dissertation advisor with additional consultation from Dr. Leticia Márquez-Magaña, a prominent molecular biologist who specializes in telomere research, to determine if there were any seemingly natural breaks across the relative lengths. I also reviewed previous research on telomeres and race to better contextualize the lengths of the participants and establish a more informed cluster analysis. I was able to coherently distinguish the sample TL lengths and operationalize cases above and below 1.5 as relatively "long" and "short," respectively. Two HER-based studies utilized a similar approach to operationalize TL in this way.

Although two HER-based studies (Agahee, Nuru-Jeter, Ramirez, Shariff-Marco, Allen, DeRouen, Elmofty, Marquez-Magana, and Gomez, forthcoming; Ramirez, Elmofty, Castillo, DeRouen, Shariff-Marco, Allen, Gomez, Naploes, and Marquez-Magana, 2017) utilized a similar, yet unpublished, approach to arranging participants by TL, such nomenclative

_____

[17] This feature bolsters the study findings and potential implications given the considerable variance that exists across the field both in biodata collection instruments and testing procedures

designations are nascent in the literature (Márquez-Magaña, 2018). However, the process of

arriving at the operationalization, wherein investigators compare T/S cross-sectionally within

two or more distinct groups of participants (i.e., individuals with disease vs. individuals

without disease), is consistent with the majority of telomere studies featuring primary data

collection utilizing Cawthon's (2002) method (Márquez-Magaña, 2018). Researchers have

observed inverse relationships between shortened telomeres and general aging (Geronimus et al,

2010). However, a standard or codification of average telomere length amongst human beings

has not yet been established (Márquez-Magaña, 2018). Accordingly, in-group TL comparisons

like ours remain theoretically and technically acceptable as well as potentially compelling.

Because telomeric degeneration is implicative of the lifespan of the cell, telomere length

can function as a proxy for biological (vs. chronological) aging, marking the passage of time

through its relative erosion (Chae et al., 2014; Epel et al., 2012, Price et al, 2012). As previously

mentioned, truncated telomeres are inversely associated with advanced age, as well as with

greater morbidity and mortality (Blackburn and Epel, 2017) Additionally, the pace of telomere

shortening and subsequent biological aging, can be accelerated by a range of stress exposures

across the lifespan, including prenatal adversity[18], early childhood trauma, and psychosocial

stress (Shalev, Entringer, Wadhwa, Wolkowitz, Puterman, Lin, and Epel, 2013). Studies suggest

there are causal pathways between these various stressors and disease manifestation,

proliferation, and premature death (Chae et al., 2014; Ramirez et al, 2017). Moreover, several

adult mental disorders (including depression) and age-related diseases (such as Alzheimer's)

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[18] Recent studies note differences in the baseline telomere length of newborn infants and have
found associations between this initial length and (1) The levels of stress reported by their
mothers prior to birth (2) higher levels of trauma reported prior to and during the birthing
process. This in-utero transference of trauma lends additional evidence to the growing field of
epigenetics.

have been implicated in bidirectional relationships between mental and physical health and telomere length (Shalev, et al., 2012). Exploring these potential connections is an undertaking beyond the scope of this study. The present investigation is centered on the potential interactions and inferences of relationships between participants' recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions, a potent form of psychosocial stress, and their telomere length.

C.) A Comparative Concern

The two-tiered arrangement of relatively long and short telomeres amongst the participants is an important contribution to addressing Question 1: What are the potential inferences of relationships between participants' reported recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions and their telomere length? With the participants parsed into two distinct groups by TL I am able to cross-tabulate their responses to variables of interest on the survey. An additional significant finding from the telomere analysis concerns the overall TL of the sample.

As I mentioned, our collaborators in the HER lab employed identical methods from a prior study on discrimination and telomeres to establish the relative TL among the participants in my dissertation. The participants in this earlier study featured a multiethnic (Black, Asian, and White) cohort of 56 women over the age of 40 who were also breast cancer survivors (Agahee et al, 2018). Figure 4.3 is a scatter plot of their relative TL as featured in an article (Ramirez, et al., 2017).

Figure 4.3
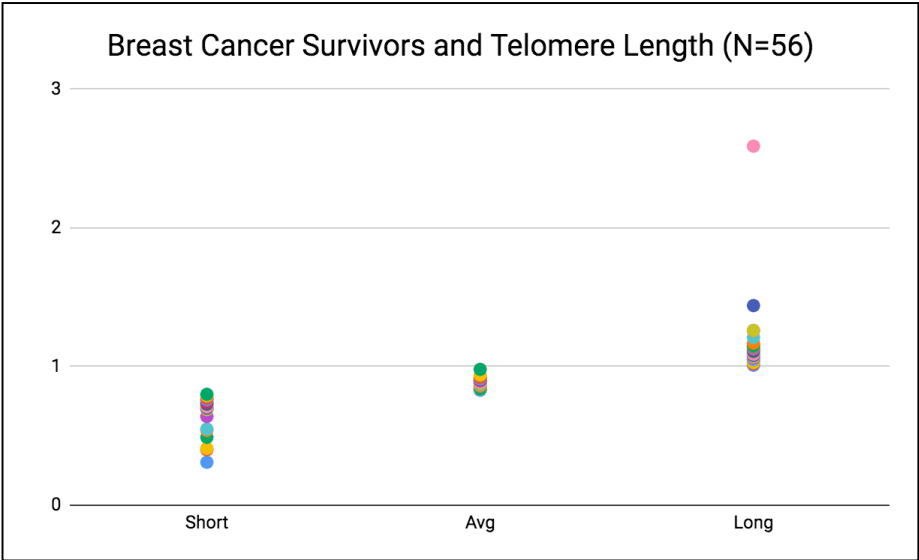
Agahee et al. (2018) also arrange these participants by TL and operationalized their relative position within the sample cross-sectionally as "short," "average," and "long." Tables 4.4-7 detail the women in the study.

Table 4.4

Breast Cancer Survivors (BCS) and TL -All Cases

0.31,0.40,0.41,0.49,0.54,0.55,0.64,0.69,0.70,0.71,0.73,0.74,0.76,0.77,0.79,0.80,0.83,0.84,0.84,
0.84,0.86,0.87,0.88,0.88,0.89,0.89,0.90,0.90,0.91,0.92,0.94,0.98,0.98,1.01,1.02,1.02,1.03,1.05,
1.05,1.05,1.06,1.07,1.07,1.08,1.09,1.11,1.12,1.13,1.14,1.15,1.17,1.21,1.26,1.26,1.44,2.59

N= 56
Mean= 0.935
Median= 0.905
Range= 2.28
Mode= 1.05, 0.84 (each appeared 3 times)
Largest= 2.59
Smallest= 0.31
Sample Standard Deviation, s = 0.32
Variance (Sample Standard), s2 = 0.10

Table 4.5

BCS and Short TL: (x)= .8 <

0.31,0.40,0.41,0.49,0.54,0.55,0.64,0.69,0.70,0.71,0.73,0.74,0.76,0.77,0.79

N= 15
Mean= 0.62
Median= 0.69
Range= 0.48
Mode= All values appeared just once
Largest= 0.79
Smallest= 0.31
Sample Standard Deviation, s = 0.15
Variance (Sample Standard), s2 = 0.024

Table 4.6

BCS and Average TL: (x)= .8 ↔ 1.0

0.80,0.83,0.84,0.84,0.84,0.86,0.87,0.88,0.88,0.89,0.89,0.90,0.90,0.91,0.92,0.94,0.98,0.98

N= 18
Mean= 0.89
Median= 0.89
Range= 0.18
Mode= 0.84 (each appeared 3 times)
Largest= 0.98
Smallest= 0.80
Sample Standard Deviation, s = 0.05
Variance (Sample Standard), s2 = 0.00

Table 4.7

BCS and Long TL: (x)= > 1.0

1.01,1.02,1.02,1.03,1.05,1.05,1.05,1.06,1.07,1.07,1.08,1.09,1.11,1.12,1.13,1.14,1.15,1.17,1.21,
1.26,1.26,1.44,2.59

N= 23
Mean= 1.18
Median= 1.09
Range= 1.58
Mode= 1.05, (appeared 3 times)
Largest= 2.59
Smallest= 1.01
Sample Standard Deviation, s = 0.32
Variance (Sample Standard), s2 = 0.10

Comparing the relative TL of the women to the results obtained for the participants in

this dissertation study is cause for concern. In order to assist in this reflection, I offer the TL

data obtained for the two sets of participants in the combined Figure 4.4 below:

Figure 4.4

Black Men and Breast Cancer Survivor Telomere Lengths
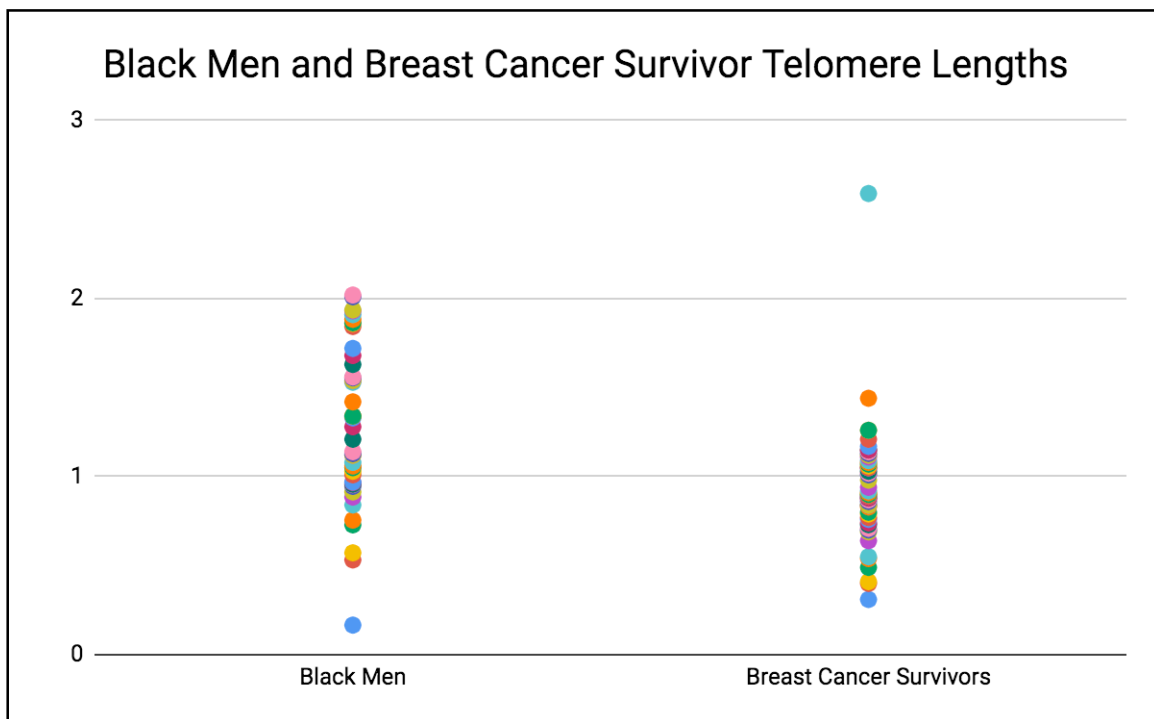
According to these comparative TL arrangements, approximately 30% of the young men

in the dissertation sample study have relative telomere lengths that are at or below 1 T/S; close to

average (.93 TS) TL for women in the breast cancer study. Moreover, the relative telomere

length of 16% (7 men) of the participants in the Black male study is shorter than the average

length of breast cancer survivors with "short" telomeres. One individual in the present study, a

19-year-old in his first year at UCLA, has a T/S of .16; shorter than all 56 breast cancer

survivors. Additionally, although the relative TL of the majority of young men are longer than

the women from the comparison study, the two groups are far closer than anticipated given the extant literature connecting telomere length to aging (Epel et al., 2009).

For example, as previously mentioned, scholars consistently observe inverse relationships between telomere length and age (Chae et al., 2014). Yet, the young men have TL hovering around and below individuals who are, in some cases, twice their age. Compounding this conundrum are additional findings that associate telomere shortening in a bidirectional manner to manifestations of life threatening diseases (including cancer). In fact, Agahee et al., (2018) found that participants who endured more severe stages of cancer had shorter average telomere length. Again, in order to participate in the dissertation study, participants had to attest to a past and current health profile free from experiences with major illnesses. Despite this eligibility requirement, several study participants had telomere lengths similar to and shorter than women who've battled stage four cancer.

The telomere findings are thus deeply disconcerting and warrant further exploration. However, there are a few caveats that may be important to note. Although advanced chronological age is associated with shorter telomeres, there is no codification of average telomere length by age and sex/gender is also implicative of biological health (Marquez-Magana, 2018). Women tend to have longer telomeres and lifespans than men (Geronimus et al., 2010). Race has also been explored in telomere biology with Black people having shorter telomeres than other groups in the US (Lee, Kim, and Neblett, 2017). Accordingly, Black individuals assigned male sex at birth have the shortest lifespan of any group in the United States (Chae et al., 2016). The previously mentioned comparative study of breast cancer survivors featured a multiethnic cohort of Asian, White, and Black women. Disaggregated TL by ethnicity are not available, however, we do know that Black women had the lowest telomeres in the group.

Additionally, Lee et al. (2017) study featured 596 Black men and women respondents, the largest such telomere study to date. On average, the individuals in this study were 70 years old with roughly 40% male and 60% female participants. The telomere range amongst these older Black adults ranged from 0.25 to 3.98. The average T/S was **1.42**; once again, this is a higher mean TL than the men in my study. Clearly, there is more to explore amongst the group of men at UCLA.

Numerous maladies across the lifespan have been found to interact with telomere length. The present study did not control potential confounding variables such as participants' exposure to prenatal or early childhood adversity, or environmental toxification. In the same vein, I rely on participant self-report measures to assess health profile and subsequent eligibility. Even with these qualifiers, the telomere findings offer an important foundation to better understand these young men and the potential impact of race-related stress on their health. The following section further contextualizes the sample through a descriptive analysis of cross-tabulations by tier of the participants' responses to items in the RCSS.

Contextualizing and Testing Variables

As previously mentioned, the first question of this study considers possible implications of connections between Black men's reporting of everyday racist encounters and their telomere length. Analysis of participant telomere length revealed the arrangement of the sample into two-tiers of individuals with relatively shorter and longer telomeres. We also learned that all of the individuals in the study have TL far shorter than previously expected. In the following section, I consider these telomere findings in relation to the participants' disparate recognitions of everyday racism through two types of descriptive analysis. First, the table below includes demographic information about the two groups cross-tabulated by telomere length. After

discussing these items, I share additional cross-tabulations of participants' responses to several variables of interest on the survey. These combined findings on participant telomere length and survey responses help answer Question 1.

Demographic/Telomere Findings

Table 4.8

Figure 4.5

DESCRIPTIVE TABLE		
DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND TELOMERE LENGTH		
N=44		
CATEGORIES	RELATIVE TELOMERE LENGTH	
	SHORT	LONG
AGE		
18-22	23	13
%	82.14	81.25
23-26	5	3
%	17.86	18.75
PARENT'S HOUSEHOLD INCOME		
<=$50,000	13	3
%	50	21.43
>$50,000	13	11
%	50	78.57
SEXUAL IDENTITY		
SEXUAL MINORITY	5	2
%	17.86	12.5
SEXUAL MAJORITY	23	14
%	82.14	87.5
RACIAL INGROUP EXPOSURE		
MOSTLY-ALL WHITE	7	2
%	25	12.5
HALF- ALL MINORITY	21	14
%	75	87.5
YEARS AT UCLA		
1-2 YEARS	25	13
%	89.29	81.25
3-5 YEARS	3	3
%	10.71	18.75
STEM		
YES	13	5
%	46.43	31.25
NO	15	11
%	53.57	68.75
BLACK SOCIAL GROUPS		
YES	13	11
%	46.43	68.75
NO	15	5
%	75.5	31.25

90
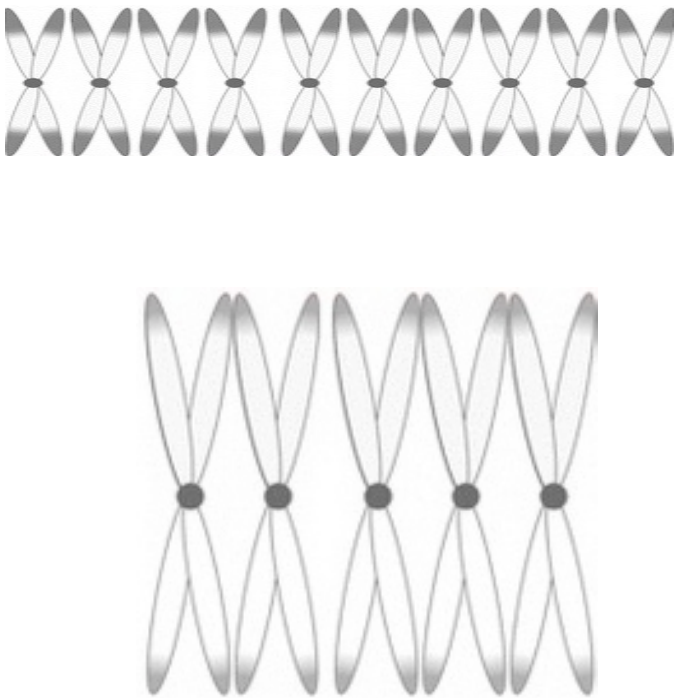
As we can see from Table 4.8, the two-tiered respondents are relatively similar across demographic domains that typically distinguish telomere length. All of the participants are college students. The majority (82%) of individuals in the study also fall within the traditional college-going age range (18-22). Additionally, nearly 90% of all participants are enrolled in their 1st or 2nd year at UCLA. Participant responses excluded from the table reveal that none of the young men are married, smoke cigarettes regularly, or report any serious illness or disease. In fact, nearly all of the students (88%), regardless of telomere tier arrangement, exercise at least once a week. Likewise, very few respondents across either tier (10%) claim experiencing higher than average general stress over the past year.

It should be noted that the survey did not ask students about their potential experiences with prenatal adversity, significant childhood trauma, or mental illness. Exposure to any one of these social epidemiological toxins may be implicative of shorter relative telomere length. Likewise, the exclusion of these variables combined with fewer participants over the age of 22 might account for the lack of an apparent age/TL distinction across the tiered sample. There also weren't any apparent telomere length differences associated with participant sexual identity.

Despite these caveats and demographic parities, there are still important differences by telomere length group. The emergent demographic differences between individuals with longer and shorter telomeres include: (1) socioeconomic class (2) racial ingroup exposure and (3) major field of study.

Demographic/Telomere Finding 1: Social Class:

Half of the Relatively Shorter Telomere Length (RSTL) group had **parental household incomes** below the national average ($50,000) (Census, 2014 Bureau) compared to a little over 21% in the Relatively Longer Telomere Length (RLTL) group. This apparent demographic

distinction amongst the participants aligns with previous telomere research in which lower

socioeconomic indicators are somewhat predictive of length (Geronimus et al., 2010).

However, it should be noted that social class is admittedly difficult to operationalize, control

for, and disaggregate from race-related stress on quantitative measures. As a case in point, the

household income of $50,000 is roughly $30,000 above the Federal Poverty Level for families of

four (ASPE, 2019). Another point of consideration is the established phenomena of poorer or

working-class individuals overestimating their family's income levels on self-report measures

(Swan, Chambers, Heesacker, Nero, 2017). Given these realities, it may be prudent to explore

the social class component with greater specificity in future studies. Still, the present findings

seem to suggest that (within the sample) access to higher income may be a form of protection

against the accumulated impact of various stressors.

Demographic/Telomere Findings 2: Racial Group Exposures:

When asked about the racial make-up of their home schools and communities, 25% of

individuals with RSTL said they spent significant time in "mostly and/or all white spaces." Only

12% of individuals with RLTL reported the same. There is a similar dynamic between telomere

shortening and a seemingly inverse relationship with increased participation in Black social

groups at UCLA. Almost 70% of participants with relatively longer telomere lengths are

members of a Black social group on campus. And over 75% of those individuals with relatively

shorter telomere length do *not* participate in such groups. These findings add biological credence

to the extant literature in higher education on the health benefits afforded Black people who

avoid white spaces (and the subsequently higher risk of encountering everyday antiblackness)

(Harper, 2007) and simultaneously find refuge in Black counter-spaces where they are able to

commiserate with in-group members about the assaults they've endured (Villalpando and

Solórzano, 1998). Counterspace engagement may support telomere longevity by providing participants reprieve from the ceaseless rumination that often accompanies ambiguous threats.

Demographic/Telomere Finding 3: Major Field of Study:

Another important demographic distinction between the participants concerns their major field of study. Close to 50% of individuals with shorter telomeres are science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) majors compared to around 30% with longer telomeres. Additionally, there are more participants with RSTL who are STEM majors numerically (13) than the total amount of participants with RLTL who are non-STEM majors (11). Once again, these findings echo scholarship on the potential damage endured by Black scholars in route to diplomas in fields where there is a higher risk of antiblack sentiment, an internalized racism, and conversely fewer Black spaces and faces to mitigate these toxins (Cedillo, 2018). The emerging demographic differences between the two-tiered participants are aligned with established knowledge regarding race-related stress and the well-being of Black students in higher education. I will now provide a descriptive analysis of the cross-tabulations of telomere length and different variables of interest from the survey.

Descriptive Analysis of Telomere Length and Recognized Racism:

I ran frequencies of participants' responses to items on the survey that addressed issues of racial discrimination. The majority of individuals (88%) have witnessed at least one instance of major racial discrimination on or around campus over the past year.

Additionally, nearly all of the students (90%) anticipate that they might endure discrimination on campus and prepare for the potential of negative interactions prior to leaving their living spaces each day. Thus, the young men, regardless of telomere length, anticipate discrimination and have witnessed at least one instance of racial violence during their time at

UCLA. This finding is unsurprising given our present knowledge of the realities of campus racism against Black students (Ross, 2017). Such acknowledgement of singular events of racial amicus does not necessarily indicate the potential health outcomes related to participants' acumen for recognizing veiled, quotidian antiblackness. In response, I provide crosstabs of participants' telomere lengths and their responses to variables concerning everyday racial microaggressions.

Table 4.9

EXPERIENCED RACIST EVENTS ON AND OFF CAMPUS

RESIDENCE HALLS/DORMS

		Never/Almost Never (N)	Sometimes/Often (N)	Total
TELOMERE LENGTH	Relatively Short	53.57% (15)	46.43% (13)	100% (28)
	Relatively Long	25% (4)	75% (12)	100% (16)
	Total	**43.18% (19)**	**56.82% (25)**	**100% (44)**

** All participants with relatively long telomere lengths reported at least one experience of racism in residence halls and dorms. Zero (0) participants with relatively long telomere lengths reported "Never."

Table 4.10

EXPERIENCED RACIST EVENTS ON AND OFF CAMPUS

WALKING ACROSS CAMPUS

		Never/Almost Never (N)	Sometimes/Often (N)	**Total**
TELOMERE LENGTH	Relatively Short	64.29% (18)	35.71% (10)	100% (28)
	Relatively Long	18.75% (3)	81.25% (13)	100% (16)

| | Total | 47.73% (21) | 52.27% (23) | 100% (44) |

** All participants with relatively long telomere lengths reported at least one experience of racism walking across campus. Zero (0) participants with relatively long telomere lengths reported "Never."

Table 4.11

HEARD RACIALLY INSENSITIVE REMARKS

FROM THEIR FELLOW STUDENTS

		Never/Almost Never (N)	Sometimes/Often (N)	Total
TELOMERE LENGTH	Relatively Short	57.14% (16)	42.86% (12)	100% (28)
	Relatively Long	20% (3)	80% (12)	100% (15)
	Total	**44.19% (19)**	**55.81% (24)**	**100% (43)**

(1 declined to respond)

** All participants with relatively long telomere lengths reported at least one experience hearing racially insensitive remarks from fellow students. Zero (0) participants with relatively long telomere lengths reported "Never."

Table 4.12

MISTREATED BY WHITE STUDENTS

		Never/Almost Never (N)	Sometimes/Often (N)	Total
TELOMERE LENGTH	Relatively Short	68% (18)	32% (10)	100% (28)
	Relatively Long	37.5% (6)	62.5% (10)	100% (16)
	Total	**54.55% (24)**	**45.45% (20)**	**100% (44)**

Table 4.13

ABOVE RACE-RELATED STRESS

		Below Average (N)	Above Average (N)	Total
TELOMERE LENGTH	Relatively Short	57.14% (16)	42.86% (12)	100% (28)
	Relatively Long	18.75% (3)	81.25% (13)	100% (16)
	Total	**43.18% (19)**	**56.82% (25)**	**100% (44)**

** All participants with relatively long telomere lengths reported at least some race related stress. Zero (0) participants with relatively long telomere lengths reported "Being not stressed at all."

Table 4.14

EXPERIENCED ANY FORM OF MAJOR RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

		No (N)	Yes (N)	Total
TELOMERE LENGTH	Relatively Short	39.29% (11)	60.71% (17)	100% (28)
	Relatively Long	18.75% (3)	81.25% (13)	100% (16)
	Total	**31.82% (14)**	**68.18% (30)**	**100% (44)**

Table 4.15

HEARD RACIALLY INSENSITIVE REMARKS FROM COMMUNITY POLICE

		Never/Almost Never (N)	Sometimes/Often (N)	Total

TELOMERE LENGTH	Relatively Short	71.43% (20)	28.57% (8)	100% (28)
	Relatively Long	56.25% (9)	43.75% (7)	100% (16)
	Total	**65.91% (29)**	**34.09% (15)**	**100% (44)**

TL and Recognition of Racism:

The cross-tabulations show that a greater proportion of participants with relatively longer telomeres recognize and name instances of everyday racism compared to their RSTL peers. More specifically, 75% of individuals with longer telomeres report experiencing racism in university-sponsored housing compared to 46% of those with shorter telomeres. Additionally, over 81% of the RLTL students experienced racism while walking on campus; more than double the percentage of RSTL individuals (35.7%) that report such experiences. Similar inter-TL proportions exists in cross-tabulations concerning how frequently participants register racially insensitive remarks from other students (RLTL=80% vs. RSTL= 43%), how often they recognize being mistreated by white students (RLTL=63% vs. RSTL= 32%), and their acknowledgement of their level of race-related stress (RLTL = 81% vs. RSTL= 60.7%). The cross-tabulations of participant telomere length and everyday campus racism offer important context for Question 1. Most presently, analysis of these quantitative data suggest the tiered telomere groups may be distinguishable by their adeptness at recognizing everyday racial assaults on UCLA's campus. As previously stated, available tests and conclusions stemming from these data are limited due to a less than representative sample of Black college men. However, the inquiry, methodological approach, as well as the cohort of interest represent novel entries in the empirical record regarding telomere-length and racism.

Question 1 of this dissertation study is: *What are the potential inferences of relationships between participants' reported recognition of their exposure to racial microaggressions and their telomere length?* In response, analysis of the available data revealed what might be surmised as an emergent relationship between Black collegiate males' adeptness at registering everyday racism and the length of their telomeres. More specifically, I learned that a greater proportion of study participants with longer telomeres were able to recognize their general exposure to everyday racial discrimination in comparison to their peers with shorter telomeres.

These findings warrant further investigation given their departure and alignment with prior research on race-related stress. For instance, substantial scholarship has uncovered what might seem to be an intuitive link between Black people's reported exposure to racism (often referred to as perceived racism) and a slew of deleterious psychological and physiological health outcomes (Harrell, 2000). Another line of research suggests that noticing racial mistreatment may be beneficial for one's mental and physical longevity compared to not registering when one is being discriminated against (Hammack, 2003). Chapter 4 findings support and align with the latter, more critical race (as opposed to the former, more reasonable race) readings of the impacts of race-related stress and health outcomes.

Recall that Critical Race Theory posits that antiblackness and white supremacy are the underlying, endemic, and permanent logics of the US, working tirelessly to position, reify, and reinforce white (and consequently antiblack) structures, identities, institutions, arrangements, and ways of being in relation to, over, and especially against Black(ed) individuals, ideas, institutions, and beingness (Bell, 2004; Dumas and Moss, 2016; Hartman, 1997). Further, CRT scholars have long clocked articulations of these logics in the everyday as mundane and insidious

acts of racism that saturate purposively white environments, like UCLA (Pierce et al., 1995;

Smith et al., 2011; Solórzano et al., 2000; Watson and Perez-Huber, 2016). In other words,

microaggressions are ontologically violent, regularly deployed, and essentially inattentive to

non-racialized characteristics (i.e. personality, disposition, intellect, spirituality, social affinity).

Thus, it seems intuitive, utilizing a CRT lens that accurately appraising attempted and successful

racial attacks may lead to healthier outcomes compared to being unaware when one is being hit.

However, as I mentioned, the present study required further investigation to better understand

this phenomenon. Additionally, as a critical race researcher, the voices of marginalized

communities remain paramount in offering an intelligible and helpful story about the questions at

hand. From these findings, I am encouraged to seek out perspectives from a subset of the 44

young men in hopes of further illuminating and understanding potential sources of the present

racism recognition/telomere length distinction.

Chapter 5

A Tale of Two Campuses:
Racial Socialization and Appraisals of Racial Microaggressions

It began to seem that one would have to hold in the mind forever two ideas which seemed to be in opposition. The first idea was acceptance, the acceptance, totally without rancor, of life as it is, and men as they are: in the light of this idea, it goes without saying that injustice is a commonplace. But this did not mean that one could be complacent, for the second idea was of equal power: that one must never, in one's own life, accept these injustices as commonplace but must fight them with all one's strength. This fight begins, however, in the heart and it now had been laid to my charge to keep my own heart free of hatred and despair. This intimation made my heart heavy and, now that my father was irrecoverable, I wished that he had been beside me so that I could have searched his face for the answers which only the future would give me now- James Baldwin, 1955

Guiding Inquiry for Phase II

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the survey and biological data provided by 44 Black undergraduate men at UCLA in order to address Question 1: What are the potential inferences of relationships between Black men's recognition of racial microaggressions and their telomere length? The findings related to this question revealed a potentially emergent relationship between Phase I participants' adeptness at registering racial assaults and the length of their telomeres. Recall that a greater proportion of the study participants with longer telomeres were able to recognize their exposure to everyday racial microaggressions compared to their peers with shorter telomeres. Phase II of this Transformative Sequential Mixed Method study builds upon the Phase I findings through qualitative inquiry and analysis in consideration of **Question 2: Which racial socialization experiences and appraisal processes of racial microaggressions are engaged by a group of collegiate of Black men at a PWI?** This question stems from extant literature across Psychology and Education with seemingly contradictory notions of what constitutes healthy preparation and acknowledgment strategies for individuals facing everyday racism. For example, proactive racial socialization and engaging counter-spaces of social support

are generally understood as positive, protective pathways for Black individuals navigating

quotidian antiblackness (Carrol, 2013). However, there is less agreement amongst scholars

across fields regarding how marginalized groups should appraise ambiguous racial threats in a

healthy manner (Stevenson, 2014).

Participants:

After considering the findings from Phase I and returning to the literature base on

everyday racism, I collected qualitative data in order to address the second research question. I

conducted a 90-minute focus group interview with two subsets of five students (10 total focus

group participants) recruited from the larger sample of 44 participants. I utilized participant

telomere length to recruit, select, and arrange the students into these groups with the goal of

better understanding the dynamics of racial socialization and appraisal processes across the

sample. More specifically, I reached out via email to all of the participants from Phase I who had

successfully completed the survey and telomere process, inviting them to participate in a focus

group to further discuss campus racial experiences. While 25 individuals accepted my initial

invitation, 12 men actually confirmed plans to participate in a focus group. Of these 12

participants, 7 were from the Relatively Shorter Telomere Group (from Phase I) and 5 were from

the Relatively Longer Telomere Group. Five men from RSTL and 5 men from the RLST

participated in the two focus groups. The young men were invited to share in distinct focus

groups, specified by telomere length. One focus group (designated henceforth as the Longer

Telomere Focus Group or LFG) featured 5 students from the previously established relatively

longer telomeres (T/S ≥ 1.5) from Phase I. The other focus group (designated henceforth as

Shorter Telomere Focus Group or SFG) featured 5 students also from the previously established

relatively *shorter* telomere lengths (T/S < 1.49).

Although these samples were technically pooled through convenience (all Phase I participants were invited to join), the participants were relatively diverse in age, year in school, stated socioeconomic status, and major. The age range in the LFG was 19-23 and 18-23 in the SFG. Both the SFG and the LFG had 3 participants in their freshman year at UCLA. Both also featured young men in their junior years who were transfer students. The LFG had one senior and the SFG had one sophomore. Both the SFG and the LFG had 2 students pursuing academic studies in STEM fields. One young man in the LFG was majoring in African American Studies. Another LFG student was interested in English and Rhetoric. The SFG had two students interested in pursuing a degree in Economics. Several participants in the LFG identified as working class. The other two LFG students self-identified as middle class. The SFG participants identified as middle class. Aligned with Critical Race Theory and TSMM, I hoped to learn from the story of this student in an endeavor to equip Black men with a more holistic navigational acumen in the face of incessant antiblackness. Their representativeness of the larger participant pool from Phase I bodes well for the trustworthiness of the data the young men offered (Creswell, 2007).

Data Analysis:

In order to learn from the rich focus group participant data, I utilized Creswell's (2007) approach for qualitative data analysis. This includes: (1) creating a listing of important statements from each interview (2) creating a description of the "what" or the "textural description" of the experience (3) building on the list of important statements by sorting these into themes (4) creating a description of the experience, including the "how" of the participants' journey including the "structural description" (Creswell, 2007, p 0.159) and (5) constructing a description that incorporates both the textural and structural, sharing the experiences as

perceived. The textural description includes "significant statements and themes." The structural

description uses the "significant statements and themes" to create a description of the "context

and setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007).

This process yielded themes related to participant racial socialization. The emergent theme,

Socialization of the Damned frames the discussion of the two focus groups' exposure to different

types of racial messages in their childhood. In addition to this analysis of racial socialization I

utilize an expand(ing) version of Solórzano and Perez-Huber's (2015) microaggression model

(figure 5.2) to analyze the two-tiered participants' appraisals (context, types, and frequencies) of

mundane antiblackness. Their disparate assessments of microaggressions are organized through a

thematic discussion of their varied abilities to *Discern the Cloaks and Daggers* of everyday

racism.

Roadmap:

This chapter is organized by the themes that emerged in conversation with the (telomere-

arranged) participants. I discuss these thematic findings through a comparative analysis of the

perspectives shared within the two focus groups. In order to do so, I sought out information

regarding how students in the two groups: (1) discussed their access and experiences (or lack

thereof) with racial socialization and (2) the participants' varied appraisals of racial

microaggressions.[1] The chapter concludes with a summary and implications for the larger

TSMM study.

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[1] I offer a more thorough engagement in Chapter 6.

Socialisation de les Damnés (Socialization of the Damned)[2]

Recall that racial socialization is the process by which parents, guardians, and other social actors prepare Black children to navigate varied aspects of antiblackness in the US (Stevenson, 2014). Although the survey administered during Phase I did not include direct inquiries regarding racial socialization, several data points in aggregate offered compelling ambient noise that informed my approach to the focus groups. For example, the survey responses revealed that 80% of the participants with Relatively Longer Telomeres (RLTL) grew up in majority Black communities compared to only 15% of individuals with relatively shorter telomeres. Additionally, 83% of individuals with RLTL responded affirmatively to survey items asking about the infusion of racial preparation messages. Meanwhile, only 18% of individuals with shorter telomeres responded affirmatively to these times of items.

Given these findings, it seemed most prudent to engage the focus group conversations as a means to better understand when the participants first learned about themselves as racialized beings in a racialized world as well as what content they learned. Prior research on the dynamics of racial socialization has identified numerous sources of racial learning in the lives of children, including their parents and caretakers (Lesane-Brown, Brown, Caldwell, and Sellers, 2005), other adult family members (Brown and Tylka, 2011), teachers, mentors, peers, and mass and social media (Stevenson, 2015). For the purposes of this dissertation I was most interested in the

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[2] This title is intended to reference and pay homage to Frantz Fanon's groundbreaking work on the violent outcomes associated with antiblackness and colonization. Fanon's most widely-read entries include his psychoanalytical investigation into the confines of everyday racism, entitled, Black Skin and White Masks (1952), and his polemic treatise on colonialism and the inevitability of decolonization; The Wretched of the Earth (1967). The latter work is known primarily by its aforementioned title in English translated from French. However, as Fanonian scholar Lewis Gordon (2016) has repeatedly articulated, it is crucial to guard against the potential of misconstrued or lost meaning inherent in popular translations of Fanon's words from what Fanon actually *intended* in the French language he employed. Thus, in addition to the study participants' reflections on their racial socialization, this section subtitle draws inspiration from the original title of Fanon's 1967 pessimistic condemnation of colonization: "Les Damnés de la Terre" or "The Damned of the Earth."

socialization participants received from their parents and/or primary caretakers. Thus, I asked

participants in both of the focus groups about the "when," "what," and "why"- or, the timing,

content, and intended purpose- of racial messages they received from their parents and/or

primary caretakers. According to their responses, it was clear that the participants with longer

telomeres were offered decidedly different forms of socialization from the participants in the

shorter telomere group.

Damned If You <u>Do</u>: Racial Socialization and the Longer Telomere Focus Group (LFG):

> *As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others…And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty…*

The five students in the Longer Telomere Focus Group (LFG) recalled receiving their

first racial socialization messages when they were teenagers. When asked about the rationale

underpinning the timing of their socialization, the young men suggested their parents may have

delayed explicitly discussing race due to the racial homogeneity of their home and school

communities. All of the young men spent their pre-adolescent years in predominantly Black and

Brown communities and several said their parents intentionally insulated them within all-Black

environments in order to protect them from the assaults of everyday racism.

> Prior to high school, I had never interacted with white people… My friends, from elementary through my sophomore year, were all Black…Race was always there but my parents didn't need to talk about it because I wasn't actually experiencing racism. -Ryan

Ryan's[3] experiences, however, highlight a common phenomenon found throughout the LFG

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[3] All names used to refer to the students are pseudonyms. I utilize these in order to protect the confidentiality of the study participants.

participants' descriptions of their racial socialization: That is, the students' initial conversations

about race with their parents commenced in response to their first experiences with

interpersonal racism.

> I've always been aware of race, but it wasn't a problem until middle school…I
> guess it wasn't until my family moved to a predominantly Asian neighborhood
> that I became racialized. There were different gangs, Asian Crips, and problems
> because my friends and I were actually Black and the Asians didn't like us, but
> ironically, they all wanted to be Black. So, we had problems. That's when my
> parents talked to me about racism. That's when race really became prevalent for
> me. In high school. - Bishop

As Bishop explains and others confirmed, these harmful encounters typically occurred in early

adolescence as the facade of colorblindness faded into exposure with increasingly racialized non-

Blacks. Although Bishop was aware of race prior to middle school, his Asian neighbors'

deployment of the oft-conjoined poles of antiblackness (negrophilia and negrophobia)

(Wilderson, 2015) necessitated his parents teaching of the deeper arithmetic of racism: (1) the

world is organized by race (2) racial organization is predicated, structured, and stabilized by the

perpetual undoing of Black beingness and (3) he is Black (Wilderson, 2015). Nearly all of the

LFG participants' parents wrestled with how best to teach this cruel equation to their children,

and perhaps more importantly, how best to "sharpen" the ability of their sons to anticipate,

understand, and navigate future instances of racial hostility. These dynamics echo the extant

literature on Black Identity Development (Cross, 1991) and racial socialization (Tatum, 1997)

which details how racist encounters often catapult young Blacks and their caretakers into greater

awareness of and preparation for relentless racial threats.

Some participants, like Bishop, experienced these encounters through negative

interactions with non-Blacks. For others, the catalyzing event that led to preparation messages

from their parents was media coverage of the murder of Trayvon Martin, the George

106

Zimmerman trial, and other police killings of Black people.

> My junior year [in high school] was the first time I ever had to deal with racism…when it became more upfront with the police killings on social media. Everything became more publicized. My parents were always wanting to talk after that. -Derrick

> [My parents] were a lot more worried about [me] driving and being out, the more Black boys kept getting murdered. My dad was giving me training all the time bro. Like damn! Can I get in the car without 'the talk?!' (*Others laugh*). -Ryan

Indeed, the increased coverage of police and vigilante violence against Blacks inspired many of the LFG participants' parents to send messages centered on navigating dangerous terrain as safely as possible. On the other hand, Temi suggested the primary source of his socialization was his own racial intuition[4] and interpretations of the increasingly racialized world he inhabited.

> My parents are from Nigeria, which is very monocultural. And they came to the US when they wanted to go to college…they kept the monocultural mindset from Nigeria, and didn't think racism really existed. So, when I first started experiencing racism- well, not personally, but when I saw the news and stories about Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner, various people targeted by police brutality, I started getting an anxiety inside myself. I would bring it up to my parents and say, 'Hey, this is happening. What do you think about this?' And they would just say, 'You're going to be fine, because you're Nigerian-American not African-American.' But I knew the problem was that no one knows the difference between Nigerian-American and African-American, they all look the same to others-Like myself. It doesn't matter to the police. If you're Black, you're Black. My parents just don't address racism. They don't think it applies to them. I had to learn on my own and with my siblings and just kind of talk about it with them. -Temi

Temi expressed feeling increased fear and anxiety as he witnessed the consequences of racism unfolding in the media. However, Temi's parents assured him that he was not at risk for being harmed. His parent's conclusion was derived from their own racial calculations in which they attributed the risk of vulnerability to unwarranted police homicide to the *ethnic* identity of the victims. Their son was safe, based on their correct discernment of varied and vast ethnic/cultural

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[4] Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) described *cultural intuition* as, "…a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data" (p.563). *Racial intuition* is a similar concept that concerns how "raced" individuals read, internalize, and employ meaning from the racialized world around them.

distinctions between African-Americans and their own Nigerian-American child. Temi, however, was unconvinced these differences mattered or that Black American *ethnicity/culture* was the transgression that incited police brutality. He rightfully perceived his potential vulnerability to racial harm as a "blacked" person as indistinguishable from other "blacked" people. Rather than internalize his parents' ideology, Temi trusted the persuasive *racialized* truths radiating from the circadian spectacle of murdered Black people. He understood the totalizing reality of antiblackness and was able to decipher the logic undergirding the system. Temi learned that blackness functions as a negation of the benefits and safety afforded a white (and nonblack) identity rather than a distinction of an ethnicity (Wilderson, 2010). He thus recognized his assignment (and vulnerability) within this preemptive negation as identical to other Black people and looked to different agents of socialization (his Black siblings) for validation, commensuration, and preparation of this fact.

Racial-violence-as-teacher also informed other LFG participants' intuition and critical analysis of their latent liability to antiblackness, most especially in the context of purposively white educational spaces:

> Now that I'm at a university, I'm seeing microaggressions…[and] racism firsthand. Stuff that I saw in news and heard about but hadn't experienced before. White people here are generally racist and you experience a different type of struggle. The stress that comes with it and the hurt and pain that comes with it is real. It has a different effect on me and I think the problems that I go through here compared to my counterparts who are still back home in the same neighborhood are a lot different. – Elen

Once again, most of the LFG participants' parents attempted to buffer their children from racism by placing them in Black communities. Unfortunately, UCLA became the proving ground that put the students' training to the test, as we will see later in the discussion of participants' appraisal, coping and response mechanisms.

Growing up I didn't really have to deal with racism, well, not necessarily deal with it, but it just wasn't a theme of my life until now [at UCLA]. This is the first time I've ever been in a predominantly white area. So, this is like the first time I've really had to like look at white people and be like, 'damn, I have to go through this.' As far as messages, along with [police killings] becoming publicized, that's when the messages from my mom and dad would be like, 'Alright, you're going to a PWI [predominantly white institution] and these are some things you'll have to deal with.' Or with police brutality, [they were] like, 'Alright, if the cop pulls you over, have your hands on the steering wheel, make sure you have your license right on the dashboard, make sure that you're ready.' And I'm like, **'I mean if they want to shoot me, they're gonna shoot me regardless...There's not much I could do about that.'** -Derrick

Derrick's parents hoped to equip their son with the necessary resources to more effectively and safely navigate hostile racial territory. This training focused on responding to police officers without being murdered and preparing for the inevitable racist encounters at a PWI. Much like Temi, Derrick's socialization was bolstered by his own reading of an antiblack world predicated on gratuitousness violence against Black people. In this way, Derrick understood his (and other Black males') potential vulnerability to such violence as unrelated to an actual transgression (such as not belonging at a university or failure to comply). His internalization of this racially realistic message aligned with other LFG participants who proclaimed that Black people were (in the spirit of Fanon, 1967) inherently "damned" within an anti-black society, regardless of the protective interventions their caretakers lauded.

Damned if You Don't: Racial Socialization and the Shorter Telomere Focus Group (SFG):

Clear differences emerged when I considered the reported racial socialization of the LFG students in relation to the messages received by peers in the Shorter Telomere Focus Group (SFG). For instance, unlike the LFG participants, SFG students reported spending significant time with white people in their home and school communities while growing up. Additionally, while all of the individuals traced their racial preparation to their parents, the young men received socialization messages at a younger age than their LFG counterparts, citing early

childhood as the onset for their racial navigation training. Similar to the LFG students, the SFG

students maintained that they were always aware of race. However, the SFG students did not

speak about "racism" as a discernible problem during any point of their upbringing, nor was their

introduction to parental racial messaging tied to a specific moment of racial hostility. In fact,

although the SFG parental messages warned the young men about the possibility of disparate

societal treatment, this socialization was largely uncritical (or lacked specificity) regarding the

broader realities of racial hierarchy.

> My parents definitely instilled a lot of messages in me about race, but they didn't
> call it race…my father is definitely more conservative. He would never use the
> term "racism" or say the problems People of Color face are due to race. He would
> just say I need to be excellent if I wanted things to work out. – Taron

Echoing this sentiment, most of the parents of the SFG students were reluctant to directly name

racism or antiblackness as a potential culprit in unfair outcomes. Moreover, their recommended

remedies to the veiled threat of racial discrimination fore-fronted assimilation into dominant,

white culture.

> Those messages were given to me. It was like, you need to act white to get ahead.
> My dad would say, 'If a cop pulls you over, act correctly.' He was like, 'Speak
> well, don't use that slang.' -Dwight

Much like parents of the LFG students, the SFG students' parents were concerned with their

children's vulnerability to police violence. However, as is evident in Dwight's recollection, the

SFG students were encouraged to speak, dress, and behave "appropriately" (i.e. white) in order

to mitigate the potential harm associated with being Black in an antiblack society. Several of the

SFG students questioned their parents' recommendation to act white as well as the possible

minimization of the hardships facing Black people.

> [My parents] knew what was up. Just, instead of saying, 'you need to act white,'
> they would say 'you need to act proper.' You know as a kid, I didn't really think
> about it much, but my viewpoint changed as I got older because I see now that it

is a very socio-economic issue as well as it's a race issue. So, like, a lot of white people are just more fluid so they wear different things whereas I feel like African Americans have a lower economic status so we wear you know, a different sort of thing. - Ono

Despite this questioning, several students also seemed to adapt and incorporate some of their parents' strategies into their own perspectives on race.

I had a big issue [with other Black people] while growing up, because I was getting good grades in school and I spoke properly and a lot of my [Black] friends didn't like it. You know, they would say, 'Uh oh, Eric is acting white…he's going to go far.' And I felt like we can't attribute positive qualities to white people. Because that diminishes what our accomplishments are as Black people. I used to be more cautious [of] saying certain ways of being are "acting white." But now I feel like "white" shouldn't be associated with "proper speech and dressing nice," because it's not "white." Like, it's just like-- it's just proper. Like, it shouldn't be just a white thing. -Eric

Performing whiteness (or adhering to the negation of blackness i.e. "don't use that slang") was a central theme amongst the SFG students who also gleaned racial knowledge from the visible messages emanating from the broader society. As a case in point, the SFG featured an extended conversation on the merits of disentangling standard (i.e. non-Black vernacular) English and other Eurocentric ways of being from the confines of "white people."

Similar to the parents of LFG participants, the caretakers of the SFG students were concerned about their children's vulnerability to racialized harm. However, these parents' sent messages that seemed to suggest their sons could avoid societal damnation and achieve success if they did not fail to follow dominant rules of respectability[5] and decency. Thus, according to their recollections, the SFG participants received racial socialization that implicitly acknowledged

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[5] Respectability politics, "…encourage the use of actions that focus on presentation of self for African Americans as a necessary or useful strategy to be safe and successful in a racist society" (Lee and Hicken, p. 423). In their article, Lee and Hicken provide perspective from respectability advocate, Randall Kennedy (2015) who argues in a *Harper's* essay that…prudent conduct and sensitivity to how we appear to others improve our chances for success in environments peppered with dangerous prejudices…[B]lacks should do what they can [externally] to protect themselves against the burdens of a derogatory racial reputation.

their possible social disadvantage and simultaneously obscured the white supremacist origin of this inherent inequity.

Summary:

In summation, both the LFG and SFG participants were offered opportunities to prepare for racial discrimination. It also appears that the students with longer telomeres internalized selective messages from their family members about the harmful nature of racism while also relying on their own emerging *racial intuition* upon witnessing or experiencing instances of racial trauma. Armed with these critically-informed perspectives, the LFG participants were less trusting of positive outcomes regarding police violence and engagement with white peers. These young men believed their personal risk for race-based violence further revealed the realities of antiblackness, confirming Black marginalization within a larger system of racial hierarchy. Conversely, students with shorter telomeres received messages from their parents relatively earlier in life to address a threat of unspecified disadvantage. When race became the topic of conversation in their homes, the SFG students were typically treated to disparaging remarks about the potential pitfalls of lower or working-class Black vernacular, expression, and or otherwise resistant aesthetics. Students in the SFG seemed more susceptible than their LFG peers to attuning their racial navigational strategies towards exhibiting and occupying behaviors and postures typically designated as "white." The next section explores how the focus group participants' internalization of their differentiated racial socialization may connect to their varied appraisals of racial microaggressions.

Discerning Cloaks and Daggers: Disparate Appraisals of Microaggressions[6]

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[6] "Cloak and Dagger" is a phrase emanating from the historical period of expansive piracy and ceaseless sabotage between mercenary agents (pirates) of European imperial powers (Portugal, France, Spain, England) on the contested oceans and colonial harbors of the 15th century Triangular Slave Trade. As forefathers of present-day CIA and M16 agents these early spies were licensed to take all necessary means to gain the upper-hand in a clandestine

In this section I utilize Solórzano and Perez-Huber's (2015) Model for Data Collection and

Analysis of Racial Microaggressions (see Figure 5.1 on 15) in order to explore the focus

groups participant appraisals of everyday racism. Solórzano and Perez-Huber developed their

model to better understand the **types** and **context** of microaggressions individuals may

experience as well as the subsequent psychophysiological **effects** and varied **responses (coping)**

associated with daily racial attacks. According to their model, **types** indicate how individuals are

targeted by varied manifestations of racial microaggression, including verbal and nonverbal

forms. Additionally, **context** refers to the different locations where these events take place.

Although the framework alludes to the practice of threat assessment undertaken by targets of

everyday racism, there has not yet been a formal operationalization of a sequenced

microaggression appraisal process. I am particularly interested in possible distinctions in how

members of the two focus groups describe the <u>types</u> of racial events they endure, <u>where</u> they

locate them contextually, and how <u>frequently</u> they recognize their occurrence. Thus, for the

purposes of this study and future research endeavors, these types, contexts, and frequencies of

microaggressions will collectively constitute participant "appraisals." In order to assess these

appraisals I will engage and expand upon Solórzano and Perez-Huber's (2015) model.

      The illustrations below detail the adaptations I employed in order to better understand the

LFG and SFG participants' adeptness at recognizing daily manifestations of antiblackness. For

instance, Figure 5.2 exhibits the constructive scaffold of the updated appraisal process while

Figure 5.3 provides more exhaustive descriptions of the framework components. Lastly, Figure

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war of appropriation over the precarious wealth and "cargo" (i.e. captured Africans and related commodities) of their imperial rivals. The swashbucklers (slave shippers) typically donned **cloaks** which concealed rudimentary but deadly pistols. They also harbored sharp swords or **daggers.** Over time, these tools of came to indicate the range of veiled (cloaked) and less covert (daggers) violent tactics utilized by the pirates in their antiblack power struggle. Today, Cloak and Dagger is a colloquialism used to convey espionage more broadly as well as related interventions including theft, coercion, torture, and assassination.

5.4 is the first amended version of Solórzano and Perez-Huber's 2015 Model for Data

Collection and Analysis of Microaggression with an integrated "appraisal." Following my

discussion of the LFG and SFG participants' appraisals of microaggressions in the present

chapter, I amend the model once more in the succeeding chapter in order to analyze the students'

coping and response mechanisms.

Figure 5.1
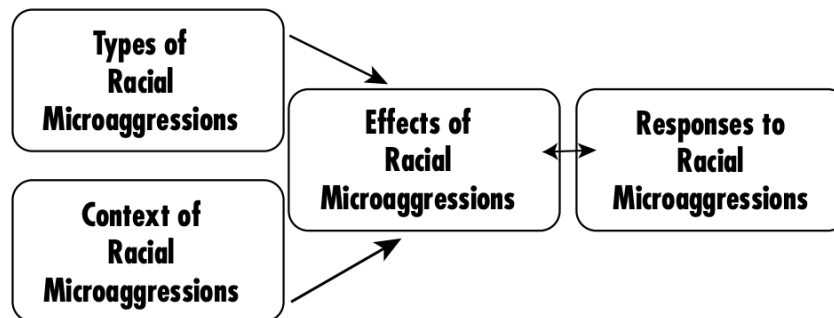
Figure 5.2
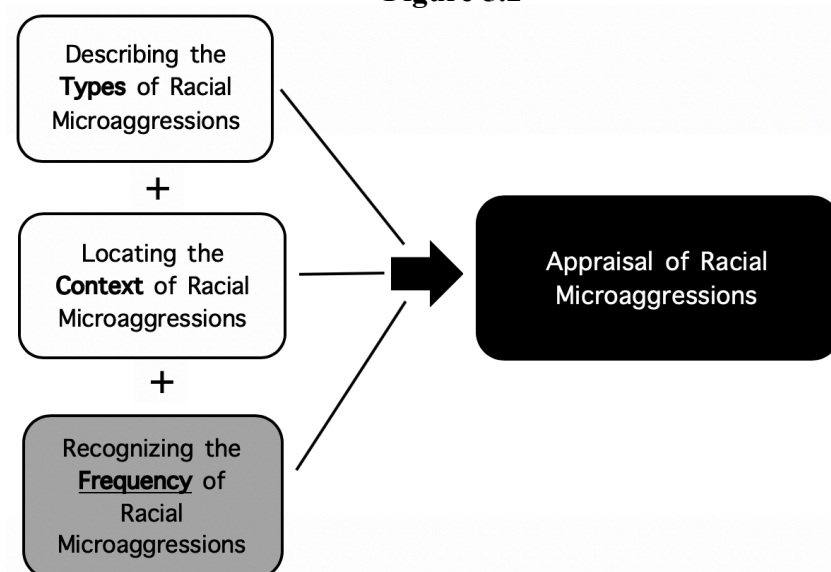
Figure 5.3

Types	Context	Frequency
How individuals report being targeted by the racial micro-aggression	Where individuals experience the racial microaggressions (the circumstance and location of the attack)	How often individuals recognize and report experiencing mundane racism.

Figure 5.4

Types, Context

Appraisal of Racial Microaggressions

Frequency

→ **Effects of Racial Microaggressions** ↔ **Responses to Racial Microaggression**
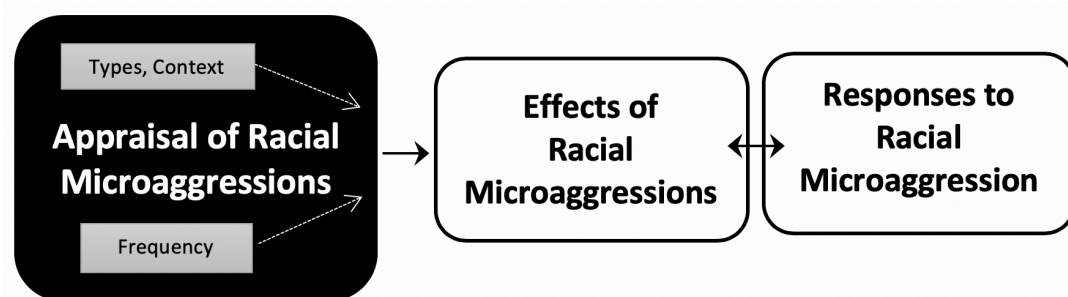
Detecting Cloaked Attacks: Appraisals and the Longer Telomere Length Focus Group

The LFG participants shared instructive personal accounts that echoed key findings from Phase I of the study in response to questions regarding their racialized experiences on campus. They described myriad manifestations of racism on UCLA's campus, ranging from clear and pernicious displays of white supremacy to more oblique, mundane yet still corrosive, antiblack sentiments. Savoka discussed one clear display early in the conversation. He recalled confronting hostile white students at a now infamous UCLA Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) fraternity "Kanye Western" party wherein partygoers dressed up in blackface.

> I think one of the first issues that I dealt with on this campus was with the blackface party that happened in 2015. It was with that fraternity, I forgot the name of the fraternity but we heard news about it…a bunch of us from Africa House [Black affinity living space] just mobbed out there. We were like really upset, really angry. I mean I was a freshman, I just got here. I never dealt with anything like that and was ready to fight. When we pulled up to the house, you could see white people bolting out from like the back doors. But…before the police were called…the fraternity members were outside their house smoking a

bong while we were outside. They're in the streets drunk just playing around not taking it seriously and one of them yelled out, 'Fuck niggers.' And they were like yelling all types of other stuff like F-bombs all that, from inside the house. It was my first year, I was only at UCLA for like two-three months and then that event happened. -Savoka

Unsurprisingly, Savoka considered this **type** of incident an act of "blatant racism."

Contextually, this particular racial attack technically occurred in a fraternity house off-campus. However, fraternity row is located across the street from the campus grounds and is a highly visible and visited staple of campus life. In fact, the event hit so close to home that Savoka referred to the Kanye Western event as a "UCLA party." He and his hallmates felt compelled to confront party goers and were able to make their way to the frat house from the student residential housing area in less than 10 minutes. Although Savoka initially appraised the event as blatant racism, he also mentioned the party could be "read as microaggresive," due to the fact that the students who organized and attended the gathering framed the event as something "funny" and "a joke." Savoka offered that the event itself was a microaggression directed against all Black students.

> We were heated hearing about it. [Campus administrators] said we threw fuel on the fire [in] going [to the party]. How?! The party was the problem. People going in blackface was the issue. That impacted us. We were blamed for responding. -Savoka

In this way, Savoka demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the technical aspects of everyday racism. Regarding **frequency**, although other members of the focus group registered the event as a racial attack on campus, they suggested such overt incidents did not happen very often on campus.

> I feel like more people pay attention and give lip service when the public and clearly racist stuff like [the blackface party] happens…-Ryan

> …Which isn't that often. - Bishop

116

Right! But we deal with shit all the time here and it usually goes unnoticed. -Ryan

This lively exchange between Ryan and Bishop provides important insight into the character of the LFG conversation regarding types, context, and frequency.

LFG Types: What

Participants in the LFG maintained that overt instances of spectacularized white supremacy, like the Kanye Western party, were relatively rare compared to their exposure to incessant, noxious, and mundane forms of racism. These everyday assaults tended to cluster into one of three categorical **types**: interpersonal microaggressions, institutional microaggressions, and structural microaggressions. **Interpersonal microaggressions** are *interactive forms of everyday racial violence enacted by individuals or groups of individuals against People of Color*. LFG participants registered these types of microaggressions when they were perceived as deviant and/or criminals by their peers, harassed by campus security and party-going/intoxicated groups of students, avoided in class/group activities, ignored and tokenized by faculty, and assumed to be student-athletes by any given person or group on and around the campus.

> Just walking to class daily. It doesn't matter and it's not because [of my hair style]. I've been scrutinized, but it's not me. That's the issue. It's not me, but I'm projected upon as if I'm going to steal [from other students]; Steal their computers; steal their phone. You know how many times like I just be walking by and this is something I noticed? I'm so ready to do a social experiment because it happens when I walk by somebody or I'm walking towards somebody and like going up Janss Steps[7]. I obviously have to go past you. People pocket check themselves [Bishop taps his pocket] just to make sure that they got all their stuff. And now so I came back from Europe about 6 months ago and it was something that I had realized while I was out there. So, they have a very prevalent issue of pick pocketing, right? But the same issue there had to make me be like okay well is it racialized? I took a step back and it wasn't. But at the same time, it *was* because the simple fact is that they're projecting the fact as to who's to be the person that is the pick pocketer. So, if you're gonna be projecting that I'm somebody who's gonna be, you know, deviant or mischievous, or I'm gonna be,

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[7] Janss Steps are a central landmark on UCLA's campus frequently visited and utilized by students, faculty, staff, and visitors. As a point of reference, actor Eddie Murphy traversed Janss Steps in his film, *The Nutty Professor* in several Rocky-inspired montages.

you know, a thief…you know I get that all the time. So, it's like it doesn't matter where I go on campus, especially amongst international students, you know, who have this implicit bias that Black people are, you know, are poor, probably. It's funny cause I walk around with my iPad, my iPhone, my computer and like camera. All day I have more than a thousand dollars in my backpack. But everyday somebody thinks I wanna steal what they got, you know. So microaggressions do happen from many people on campus, not just you know, the white people. -Bishop

In this example, Bishop appraises the event as a "microaggression" and labeled the type

of violence as more interactive/kinesic (prejudiced glances/body language and movements

stemming from assumed criminality due to racial prejudice). Bishop also described the context of

the event (walking across campus), and the frequency of its occurrence (everyday). Moreover,

Bishop made certain to characterize the perpetrators (white, international,[8]and other students)

and further explain his assessment process in determining the underlying cause for his

mistreatment. He concluded that the pocket-checking was not tied to his own actions or

propensity (vis a vis -need) to steal from others. Instead, Bishop understood others assumed he

was a thief due to his physical Black presence, readily associated with deviance, poverty, and

criminality. Bishop's experiences and appraisal was markedly similar to the remaining LFG

participants.

I experienced a microaggression almost every time I got to the elevator in the residence hall. People would automatically push the 4th floor…the Black floor. I didn't tell them what floor I was going on to, but they see me and they would be like, 'Oh 4th?' and then click it. So, it's like, it's the assumption that because I'm Black and I'm in the elevator that they just assume that I live on that floor and that's the floor I'm going to. -Savoka

Like Bishop, Savoka referred to this additional interpersonal racial incident as a

microaggression. In this case, the racial violence was characterized by an attempt to flatten

Savoka's unique essence into an immutable, interchangeable and predictable Black avatar. The

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[8] Bishop later elaborated and confirmed that he was referring to Asian international students.

118

microaggression took place in the residential area/living space on campus. Additionally,

Savoka experienced this type of attack rather frequently, almost every time he used the

residence hall elevator.

> There have been instances where the N-word has been popping up a lot recently. Just like around campus, in the dorms…People who aren't Black continue to believe they can own anything, any word, or anyone who is. And it doesn't matter if it's in a song. Like, it's the same shit either way. –Derrick

Derrick's experience is also similar to his LFG peers in that he describes the frequent,

interpersonal deployment of an insidious, *verbal* racial assault on campus animated by

underlying, antiblack sentiment (nonblack ownership of Black beingness/culture/words).

In addition to recognizing interactive assaults, the LFG participants were also adept at

marking numerous episodes of **institutional microaggressions,** *the everyday enactments of*

policies, procedures, and/or willful neglect that concretize racism. The LFG students registered

these cementing practices in hiring and promotion discrimination, the decidedly and perpetually

low rate of Black student enrollment and Black faculty representation, the relegation of Black

staff to janitorial and other service-related positions on campus, and the consistent precarity of

Black academic and supportive spaces.

> I feel an obligation to kind of be in a leadership position…I'm part of a leadership and activities group on campus and I can count the number of Black people like in my hand in the group of the 200 plus people. There's this thing called group leader where you can lead other peers…in my group, I've been there the longest and I've put in like the most work. So, I'm technically the best person to be group leader. I wouldn't usually apply, but because I'm gonna be a senior next year…I did…(pause)…I wasn't picked and I was kind of confused when I saw the results. The person that was picked was an incoming junior who was white and was at a lower level. Every member has a ranking…a grade. And mine is an A. This person [who was picked] has a B minus…I was just like 'what does this mean?' Looking at the director and organizer of our group, he's a 70-year-old white male who has been there for so many years. So, I knew that I experienced this kind of institutionalized racism by how few other Black people are in the leadership and activities group and it became more clear the fact that he-- when he decided…even though they weren't better, he picked that person. -Temi

In describing this incident, Temi provides important insight into the sequence of his

appraisal process. Faced with the reality of an unjust and otherwise unexplainable outcome

regarding the group leader decision, Temi read the race, age, gender, *and* racialized history of his

director/leader. He assessed these as risk factors for the leader's likely collusion with

institutionalized racism. Additionally, Temi did not doubt his relative preparedness or

capabilities for the group leader position. He was confident in his likely selection given his

experience, high "grade," and the fact that the younger, white student was not a "better" choice

according to relevant criteria. Bishop describes another type of institutional microaggression

below.

> I think for me, every time I go to the African-American Studies Department or
> Bunche (the Black Studies Center), I feel a microaggression because like, not only
> are they the last department to be departmentalized, but when you go in there you
> wouldn't feel out of place, you just feel like they are really giving nothing (as far
> as resources) to work with. Every time I go there - honestly one of the places I
> feel most comfortable on campus…and I do my work there sometimes…I just feel
> like they're basically given shit to work with. -Bishop

> *(In response)*

> I agree…I've been going to a lot [Afrikan Student Union] meetings and I get to
> see what their room [in the Student Center] looks like and it's really small; it's
> extremely small. And I think last week when we had the meeting, they were
> renovating and it was like the paintings were trash, there was trash everywhere,
> all the rooms were trash, and they have to pretty much fix it from the bottom up. I
> was like, oh damn, the room is too small and it's really crowded in there, we have
> to really like make a place on campus and dealing with all of this and I kind of
> thought like what are other [student] organizations having to deal with, but you
> look at them - you look at other resources on campus- they're not poor- they have
> all the resources in the world. -Derrick

> *(In response)*

> Literally, I've seen the same room before [ASU] was housed there, and it was
> even cleaned up and fixed up prior to this year. Now there's really shit
> everywhere, like, other stuff from the building being stored there alongside our
> space. I could attest that as well. -Savoka

As this exchange exemplifies, these students categorized UCLA's habitual lack of support for Black-focused spaces as predictable, willful and/or indifferent, negligence. Later in the conversation, the participants named this institutional disinvestment as a logical consequence of Proposition 209; a piece of so-called "anti-affirmative action" legislation passed in California in 1996 that severely limited racial reparatory remedies in admission considerations. In 2006, just one decade after the passage of Prop 209, UCLA enrolled a total of 99 undergraduate Black students (including student athletes)[9].

In addition to interpersonal and institutional microaggressions, the students with longer telomeres discussed various campus **structural microaggressions**, or, the *ubiquitous, mnemonic residue of the racist origins of the structured environment that reverberates and sustains racial harm*.[10] More specifically, the participants were frequently reminded of their school's toxic and racist foundation through visible white statuary and other renderings of white settlers littered across the campus by racist graffiti carved into the furniture in residence halls, parking garages, bathroom stalls, and classrooms, and by the familial monikers (including those of avowed and overt racists) that serve as the namesake for numerous eponymous buildings, halls, rooms, roads, paths, and student support centers.

> There's a photo of some white professor lady in [the dining area] in the dashiki. She's just in the dashiki and just like smiling with a bunch of like African kids, masks, and artifacts in the background. Every time I see that I'm just like... [ugh!]
> -Ryan

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[9] In 1995, 7.1% of the university's undergraduate student body was African American. In 2005 the number was 2.8%.

[10] The participants themselves did not organically offer this particular nomenclative taxonomy for the "types" of microaggressions they endured. I utilized a CRT epistemological approach to sift through and discern the nuances between the examples of everyday racism recounted by the participants. I then shared my plan with the participants to organize their responses in this way and sought their feedback and approval prior to this writing. Thus, the framing of interpersonal, institutional, and structural microaggressions is a collective creation between myself and the LFG and SFG participants. I offer our operationalization of these distinctions throughout the chapter and provide a more detailed report of this taxonomical *finding* in the summary and conclusion section.

(In response)

Colonizer! -Bishop *(All laugh)*

The LFG participants reported experiencing structural microaggressions less frequently in our conversation. However, they constantly discussed the embeddedness of antiblackness at UCLA (and the US) as a self-reinforcing and causal catalyst for their ongoing experiences with interpersonal and institutional microaggressions.

Relatedly, the LFG participants also registered *vicarious microaggressions*, or racial attacks aimed at other unspecified Black people.

> I've just heard a lot from Black males-and Black women as well-of being questioned of their ID's by (University of California Police Department) like, 'Can I see your ID,' whether it's that or I think on the flip side of that, is a stereotype of Black students only being athletes here and I can't tell you how many times I've had a student that I counsel who told me that yes, they get asked, 'Oh what sport do you play here?' -Ryan

Ryan and three of his LFG peers work in paraprofessional positions at the university (i.e. peer-to-peer counselors, student organization leaders) that allowed them to witness and intervene on the trials and tribulations of other Black students. The young men maintained that hearing about these experiences as well as registering general Black exposure to racism was also stressful.

> There have been so many cases where someone white has called the cops on someone Black on just being. Like if they're sleeping in like a residential hall, or they're eating at a barbecue or renting an Airbnb, they're getting the cops called on them. And just like reading [about] that just kinda gets you going. – Temi

> So right now, I'm in a Sociology upper div class called Race and Ethnicity in America. I'm in an introduction to African American History class and Sociology and the Environment, which covered the social organization of Black communities. Being in all those classes-- like consistently--and it wasn't the fault really of the professor--but just being consistently brought into the scope of stories of--of like current events. Like Temi just mentioned, people getting-- Black people getting the cops called on them and like their lives being threatened because of that…Like…the woman who called on the guy who I think was looking for directions and like the cops showed up…I think even that and being

placed in a constant---like just having to dissect those instances and understand them and like just be exposed to them (trails off and pauses). As a white student you're just maybe like, 'Oh that sucks, like damn our country…' But as a Black student, every time you come across a new event that has to deal with someone that *you* could be in that scenario-- That, in itself--even if that isn't an instance that directly affecting you-- it is indirectly causing you, um, like racial fatigue-- or you know, just something that you have to think about, where again, no one else really probably would have to, because you could think man, like this is-- this is a position, I could be in. I've just really realized the consistency of having to hear these stories; it's just like exhausting at this point. -Ryan

According to the responses in the focus groups, the LFG participants registered various types of racial encounters as racial assaults, appraising seemingly ambiguous incidents as definitive threats to their well being as Black men. In addition to recognizing the racism inherent in these incidents, these students distinguished them from other forms of white supremacy. More specifically, the LFG students considered these racist events *microaggressions* due in part to their ambiguity, the subsequent energy required to decipher their underlying messages, and the harm they inflicted.

[In regards to the pocket checking on the Janss steps] I took a step back…I set back my anger and…my frustration and sat on it for a little bit and actually had to figure out, was it truly-- what were truly the indicators that I felt like made it discriminatory. And after picking through the pile and finding out *why* I felt stifled, I understood it as a microaggression and a racialized incident or racialized discrimination against me. – Bishop

LFG Context: Where

Figure 5.6 features a map of UCLA's campus overlaid with circles. The dots signify the places on campus the students reported experiencing racial microaggressions. These events took place at more than 35 different locations across the university space, including: classrooms, classroom-based virtual discussion boards, residence halls, walkways, dining commons, the library, student support centers, workout facilities, restrooms, athletic competition spaces, the bookstore, amongst other spaces outside of the formal campus area. It is important to note that

the map of the students' experiences does not mark "frequency." That said, there were certain

locations on the maps where the participants reported enduring multiple microaggressions.[11]

As is evident from the map, the LFG students felt besieged by an array of assaults across

popular and remote areas of the university. They were more likely to encounter interpersonal

forms of racism relative to their exposure to institutional and structural microaggressions. There

doesn't seem to be much legible clustering of everyday racism beyond this trend. According to

the students, their vulnerability to everyday racism stems from their enrollment at the university

and subsequent encounters with non-Black people, places, and ideologies.

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[11] An in-depth Critical Race Cartographical (Velez and Solórzano, 2019) exploration of the participants' navigation of everyday antiblackness (McKittrick, 2006; Shabazz, 2016) is beyond the scope of this dissertation study. However, future research may be able to expand the present mapping with a "ground truthing" effort. Ground truthing refers to a technique in GIS (i.e. remote sensing) in which information is collected "on location" to corroborate the image data with real features and materials on the ground. Ground-truth data thus aids in the interpretation and analysis of what is being sensed. Participants shared rich information about the context of the microaggressions they endured that may be helpful in understanding the location of these events.

Figure 5.5
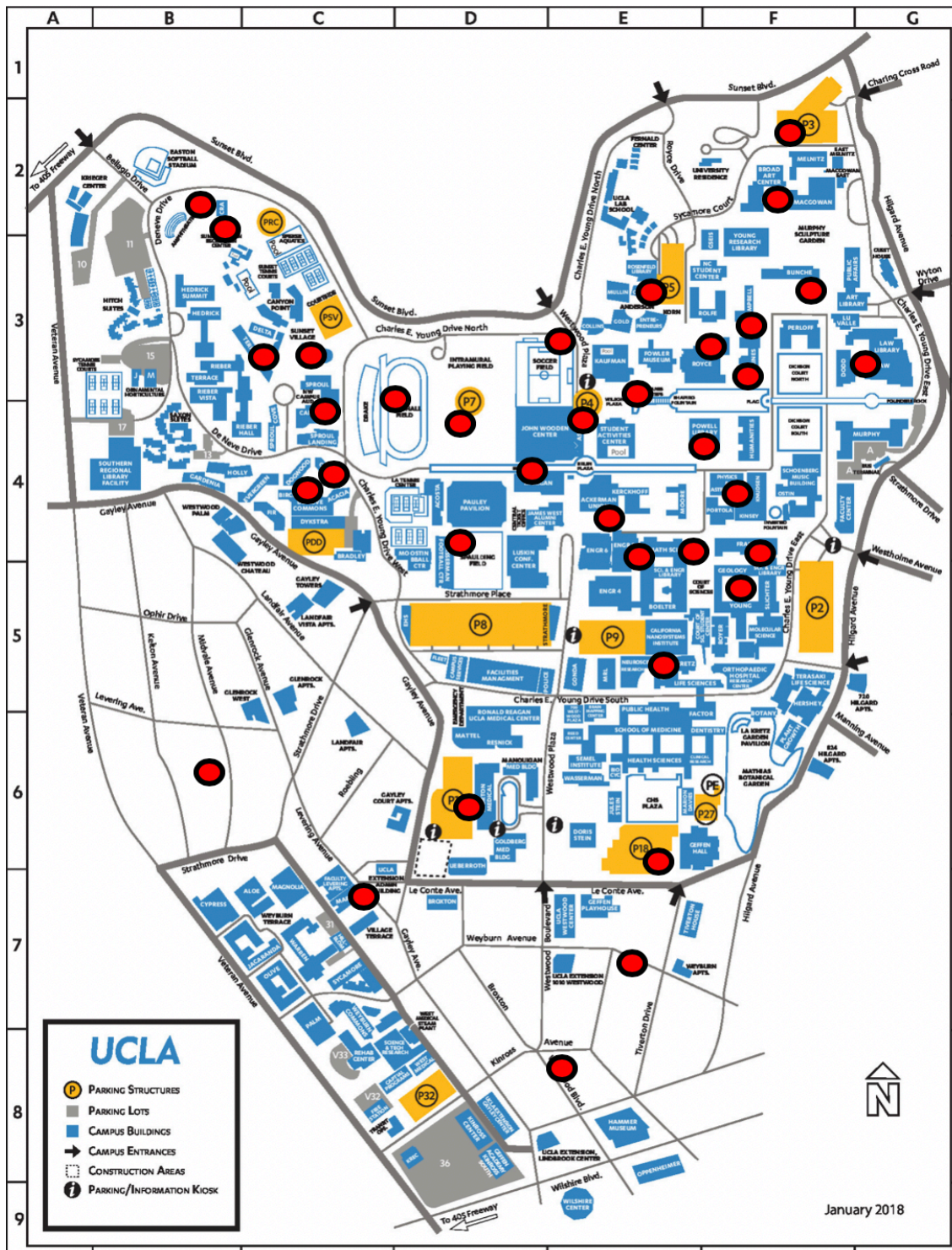
LFG Frequency: How Often

Most of the participants suggested they endured some type of racial microaggression at least

once a day.

> I would say frequently. I would say very frequently…In the matter of times in a
> day? I can't honestly count…Sometimes it's better than others, sometimes it's
> worse. But, I would say daily. -Bishop

> *(In response)*

> Yeah, I would say daily. You really can't get away from it. -Ryan *[Agreement All]*

Participants nodded their heads and offered verbal affirmations when Ryan shared the sentiment

that racial microaggressions are an unavoidable part of life as a Black UCLA student. However,

the preliminary agreement amongst the participants shifted when they reflected on the nuances of

their personal experiences.

> You know, I believe it may not be an everyday occurrence that I experience,
> 'cause a lot of the situations that like microaggressed me, happened, I think a lot
> of my freshman year when I lived on the African floor [in my residence hall]. But
> now I'm more perceptive to any little instance that I think is a microaggression. I'll
> be able to pinpoint that and because of my new knowledge, like, I know where to
> avoid certain people and places I know are messed up. So, I don't see it as much.
> -Savoka

> *(In response)*

> In the same sense as [Savoka], Like I just—I don't really deal with white people
> in most or all respects. Like unless, I have accidental interaction with them on the
> way to class. Like I mean, I may bump into one haha--- *(group laughter).* That's
> about all of it though. I don't really talk to them. Of the racism I do experience,
> it's usually through the [other Black] people on my [residence hall] floor. I
> usually hear their stories and it's usually how I internalize it and how I learn from
> their experiences of places to avoid. - Derrick

> *(In response)*

> I guess for me, it's going back to how much I involve myself on campus that
> determines how much I'd experience discrimination. Recently, it's not too
> frequent I would say, cause after that situation with the whole leadership applying

126

thing, I just kind of stepped back and I'm kinda going back to just kinda keeping
to myself and [the racism] kind of delved back down a little bit. -Temi

Savoka, Derrick, and Temi's amended reflections on their exposure to racism paint an

important picture regarding the realities of racism on UCLA's campus. The combined responses

in the LFG provide evidence that these students experienced the violence of interpersonal (and

other) microaggressions in most interactions involving non-Blacks at UCLA. Consequently,

anticipatory planning, recognition, avoidance and, at times, isolation served as the students' most

effective sanctuaries from the endemic and incessant attacks.

Other notable through-lines emerged in the participants' rationale for labeling the racial

assaults they experienced microaggressions. These young men were keenly perceptive of their

mistreatment and appraised these events *as racist* based largely on the potential negative impact

of each attack.

I would call it a microaggression due to the way it impacts me. -Temi

Moreover, the LFG students understood they were exposed to and experiencing

microaggressions (as opposed to some other form of racism) due, in part, to the ambiguous

nature of the assaults and the subsequent energy expended to decipher and determine the harm

embedded in interactions.

The racism I've experienced on campus is more indirect than direct and are
therefore more of microaggressions. -Savoka

I would call them microaggressions for a few different reasons. Primarily, the
simple fact that in the larger scheme of the academic space that we're in…the way
this stuff happens is almost as if it goes unnoticed. -Ryan

In other words, these students distinguished microaggressions as particularly insidious and

mundane. However, it should also be noted that the participants did not regard or mention the

127

intentions (malicious or unconscious) of microaggresive perpetrators as necessary or relevant

criterion in their threat appraisals.

> [Regarding the pocket checking interpersonal microaggression] I took a step
> back…I set back my anger and…my frustration and sat on it for a little bit and
> actually had to figure out, was it truly-- what were truly the indicators that I felt
> like made it discriminatory. And after picking through the pile and finding out
> *why* I felt stifled, I understood it as a microaggression and a racialized incident or
> racialized discrimination against me. – Bishop

Summary of LFG Appraisals

In summation, the participants with longer telomeres exhibited a profoundly nuanced and

exhaustive understanding of different forms of racism. They were able to differentiate rare,

explicit spectacles of white supremacy on campus from more routine, concretized, and veiled

racism. The students registered what they called "microaggressions" throughout any given

interaction with non-Blacks, stated and hidden institutional policies (including willful neglect),

as well as banal reminders of UCLA's decidedly racist foundation. They tracked these various

types of microaggressions across more than 30 locations within and beyond the broad scope of

the campus terrain. The participants also initially reported feeling susceptible to being targeted

by microaggressions every day by virtue of their status as students in an inherently racist space.

However, several participants offered the caveat that their risk of exposure depended on the

extent to which they knowingly ventured into contact with non-Black persons or spaces.

Ultimately, the young men provided vivid descriptions of their negative racial encounters,

agreeing unequivocally that UCLA is a "toxic" place for Black students. They confidently

labeled what might otherwise be considered more subtle, nebulous or "cloaked" racial assaults *as*

racial microaggressions. I will now offer an analysis on the appraisals of the participants in the

shorter telomere focus group.

Registering the Daggers: Appraisals and the Shorter Telomere Focus Group

> *All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; When using our forces, we must appear inactive; When we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; When we are far away, we must make him believe we are near. -Sun Tzu*

The SFG participants offered distinct reflections regarding their racialized experiences on campus. However, eerily similar to the LFG, the SFG also began with an account of an overt, interpersonal, antiblack attack at an adjacent white fraternity party.

> Just with the fraternities on campus, some of them are, or seem to be pretty racially biased. Like, I've had some friends come up and you know we want to go out that night and we go up to the frats. And like, I know people in there, and, you know, I'm cool with them, just through the kind of different circles I'm in. But when I come up with like my boys, who are also African-American, they'll be like, 'You know we can't let you in.' And I'll have white friends in the frat that are very, kind of candid with me, and I consider them good friends. [One of my friends] was like, 'Yeah, I don't think I can get this many Black people in. Like keeping it real with you bro.' Like straight up stuff like that. I've heard that a few times. You know I'll just- you know you see them letting in white people that are not in the frat and like you know when I see these people outside of this context, like we're cool, we play basketball together. I see them in the gym and it's all love but because there is a group of us, I can see you look at us and they're taking it back. And kind of just like, 'No, we can't let you in' you kind of see maybe the people higher up in their frats kind of behind him, like shaking their heads and pointing at us when they see us walk up. So, like, if you're not an athlete, then you don't have a reason to be there while you're Black, like you're not going to get into those spaces. So that's been really frustrating and surprising. -Jonathan

Based on our established taxonomy, it seems Jonathan has described an explicit, **interpersonal** microaggression occurring within the **contextual** setting of a white, frat house party. His appraisal is thus reminiscent of Savoka's (from the LFG) initial account of everyday racism given their apparent categorical (type) and geographical (context) parallels. Upon closer examination, these similarities also demarcate important, recurring thematic distinctions between the two focus groups.

For example, recall that Savoka originally experienced the frat party-based

microaggression *vicariously*. That is, the student and his friends registered the SAE party itself

as well as the decisions of countless, amorphous attendees to wear blackness as a costume, as

palpable, interpersonal racial assaults against the *unspecified Black student body at UCLA*. As

members of that unspecified body, Savoka and his peers understood that they were vulnerable

and subjected to these microaggressions as secondary or vicarious targets by virtue of their

enrollment in (and their physical proximity to an event taking place at) the university. These

students became the primary targets of more intense racial assaults[12] only when they confronted

the party-goers, an intentional, interruptive countermeasure against the initial, secondary racial

attack.

In contrast, as previously mentioned, Jonathan and his peers endured a *direct,* interpersonal

act of racism. Quite different from Savoka and his friends, these young men were subjected to

racialized exclusion while attempting to *gain entry and socialize* at a white fraternity party, a

party initiated and populated by individuals Jonathan described as "friends" from other social

circles. These very same "friends" perpetuated the racist act against Jonathan; informing him that

the number of his (non-student athlete) comrades exceeded the permissible Black quota at the

event. Additionally, although Jonathan mentioned he had experienced this particular type of

violence a few times, he also repeatedly returned to the contextual site of his violent encounters.

He felt *frustrated* and *surprised* by the "friendly fire" he experienced in contrast to his otherwise

positive relationships and acceptance with whites in other circumstances. The thematic

distinctions (regarding the terms of exposure, anticipation, and appraisal) evident between

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[12] The word "nigger" was hurled at them and they were directly ridiculed/threatened by incensed fraternity members

Jonathan and Savoka's accounts are also present throughout the broader SFG discussion of microaggression types, context, and frequency.

SFG Types: What

Similar to their LFG peers, participants in the SFG said that overt racism was a rare occurrence on campus. Truth be told, the students were nonchalant, *in general,* about the holistic racial campus climate during our discussion, hesitating to assign racial connotations to any given negative interaction with others. In fact, Jonathan's aforementioned "doorway denial" is one of the few events recalled in our discussion that a student characterized as definitively racist, *without further prompting or conversation.*[13] Additionally, the SFG students did not report recognizing everyday racism across institutional, structural, or vicarious domains. The few racial incidents the students did relay are best described as interpersonal microaggressions. One such encounter is detailed below.

> **...**So, this one thing happened before I even came to the school. It was for the whole [Black newly admitted student program] thing…I came for that event because I was admitted and everything, and I was at a parking lot, the parking lot right next to -um- Parking Lot 5. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Parking Lot 5. I paid for a whole day [parking] pass thing and like I didn't even need to be there the whole day. I don't know why but I paid for the whole day pass, right? So, then when I got back to my car I was going to leave the lot but I still had this parking pass that was good until 6:00 am the next day. So, I saw this white lady in the lot that was about to go pay [for her own pass]. I was on my way to my car and like, I, like, I asked her as I walked by, holding the pass, like, 'Oh, are you about to pay to park?' And, like, she didn't say anything and just like continues to try to pay. So, I figure she doesn't hear me. So, I'm like, a little louder, 'Excuse me miss, are you about to pay to park? I have this pass you can use.' And then like, she just ignores me and then I started walking closer towards her and that's when she's like, kind of like calls out 'Joel!' and like, her husband or whoever starts walking towards her or whatever, like, to make sure everything's okay. Then I was like, 'Oh, you know, I had the pass that would last until the next day so you wouldn't have to pay,' and they just said, 'Oh, okay.' - Ono

Ono describes an incident in which a white person disfigured and mutated his altruistic gesture

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[13] I address this caveat on page 36

131

into an attempted assault. On the surface, it appears he was exposed to a common, interactive, and blatant form of everyday racism. Ono's appraisal of the episode, however, was neither straightforward nor definitive.

> Thinking about it now, I haven't done that again. Like, period. Like, there's no way I will try to give [anyone] free parking again. But at the end of the day, I feel like you can't say it's *really* racism though. Maybe it is. But who knows for sure why she did that. -Ono

Ono reveals his movements and actions (future attempts at sharing parking passes) have been irrevocably altered by his encounter with the white woman and her husband. Despite this compulsory adjustment, Ono does not appraise the interaction as a racial microaggression (or even racial in nature) due to his inability to confirm tangible racial malevolence within the person who had perceived his parking pass (or his body/voice/beingness) as a viable weapon. He was not alone in this this approach to recognition.

> I haven't had any racial experiences or feeling targeted 'cause of my race here…There's other internal stuff I feel I've been through. **But it's harder to really gauge whether it's racial or not.** – Eric Part 1

> To be completely honest, I haven't really run into many instances of racism my entire life. I have no idea why, I really just consider it a blessing, but **if anything, I have been in small stuff here and there. I don't know that I'd call it racial. It's definitely not anything huge.** – Taron Part 1

Like Ono, Eric, Dwight and other students in the SFG attributed their uncertainty regarding the raciality of their negative experiences to the lack of clearly perceivable racist *intentions* on behalf of their would-be offender(s). In general, members of the SFG utilized an intent-centered threshold in order to determine the presence or absence of racism in exchanges with other people. Unsurprisingly, these students typically did not often encounter other people on campus overtly supporting white supremacy. Moreover, whenever the SFG students did report experiencing everyday racism (i.e. being denied entry into a white fraternity party because the

student brought along too many other Black people, a white woman calling for help because

the student attempted to give her a parking pass, etc.) the instances were much less ambiguous

than those named by their LFG peers (see previous "types" of microaggressions in the LFG

section). This is a reasonable and somewhat predictable outcome given the underlying logic

governing the SFG students' appraisal process[14]. However, it is also worth repeating that even

the seemingly overt instances of everyday racism reported by the SFG students were not

necessarily appraised as such, not without subsequent hesitation, caution, and uncertainty.

In the course of our conversation I invited the group to revisit the moments described by

Dwight and Eric as "small stuff here and there" that was mostly "internal." I asked the students

to elaborate on their experiences for the sake of our group better understanding what had actually

occurred, despite their initial hesitation to name these events as racial. Their responses are

included below.

> ***…But it's harder to really gauge whether or it's racial or not…***Ok, I remember
> being in a management class like two years ago and I was going to get my
> midterm back from my TA. I think I was the only Black person in the class
> honestly. And I was going to the TA to get my midterm, he like goes through it or
> whatever and picks mine out and he's like hella surprised. And he was just like,
> 'Oh you did like really well.' I'm just like, 'Okay.' 'Cause there's all these Asian
> and white people around like trying to get their midterms too. He's like super
> surprised. He's just looking at me, surprised. And the only thing I'm thinking is
> like, 'Wow. Does this dude really think I'm stupid because I'm Black?' I'm just
> like 'Wow, that's crazy.' That's like one of the few experiences I've had here like
> I'm really feeling like, 'Damn, these people are really ignorant.' -Eric Part 2

> ***…if anything, I have been in small stuff here and there. I don't know that I'd
> call it racial. It's definitely not anything huge…*** I would say most of the stuff is
> just something little, but I just thought of something right now. So, Ackerman in
> the student union, I work in an office in there. I will always get food in the student
> store and I've been there so often, almost every day, and I hear most people order
> their food. And the person who's the cashier there doesn't ask [other people] if
> they're a student. If you're a student you don't have to pay tax [for your
> purchases]. So, every time I go up, literally I would go to the same place, and they

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[14] As we will see later, this intent-centered threshold also has implications for context and frequency.

still ask me, 'Are you a student here?' -Taron Part 2

After hearing the extended versions of their experiences, I asked Eric and Taron how they (and other students in the SFG) might appraise these situations in the context of our conversation concerning racial microaggressions and racial campus climate.

> I think- I don't know if I would consider this a microaggression or even racist. I think it might just be some prejudice that this person exerted, I guess, upon me. And like, that's really just out of a basic prejudice. They thought I may not be smart. – Eric

> So, I mean, I don't know if that's like a racial thing or a microaggression. I think it could be. But I'm not sure. - Taron

In summation of "types," the SFG students suggested that overt manifestations of racism were less likely to occur than indirect and (in their own words) "unintended" forms of discrimination. Additionally, echoing Phase I findings, SFG participants offered only a few examples of the racism they actually endured. These incidents tended to be rather blatant and overt manifestations of antiblackness. However, upon closer examination of the experiences the racism the students reported (but did not necessarily name as racism) it appears the students in the SFG encountered a range of racist interactions. In actuality, they recounted a few instances of being targeted by overt manifestations of white supremacy as well as more routine, banal racial harassment. Still, all of the racial encounters they described could be categorized as interpersonal microaggressions. Additionally, there were no reported instances of institutional or structural forms of everyday racism throughout their accounts of racial discrimination. This conscious and unacknowledged naming of racial microaggressions has implications for the broader SFG Appraisal process.

SFG Context: Where

Recall that, in this dissertation study, "context" refers to the location and situational factors in any given microaggression. Figure 5.7 below is a map of UCLA's campus overlaid with red dots. The dots signify the places on campus the students *initially* reported experiencing what can reasonably be understood as microaggressions. These events took place at 4 different locations across the university space: A fraternity house adjacent to campus, a campus parking lot, a classroom, and a common eating area. The racial attacks were interpersonal and singular (no repeated occurrences at the locations).

Figure 5.6
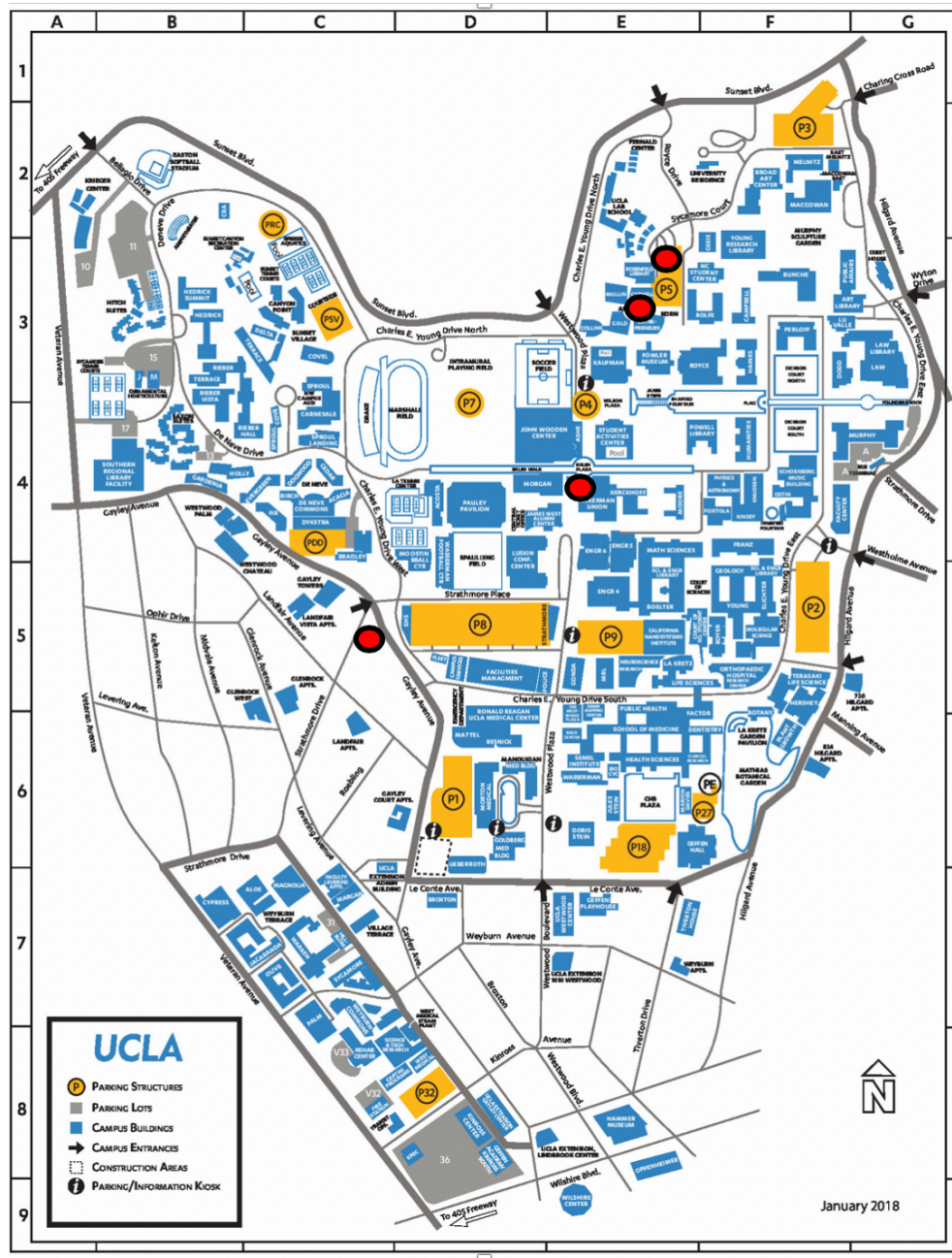
As is evident from the participant-generated contextual map, the SFG students believed the campus was relatively free of mundane antiblackness.

As previously mentioned, the SFG students were hesitant to categorize their negative and ambiguous encounters with others as racial, racist, or racial microaggressions. When the students reported racial experiences the incidents themselves tended to be more overt and spectacular in nature. However, even these few occurrences were rarely designated as definitively racist. In response to probing questions, several students used proxy terms (i.e. prejudice, small, internal, unintended) to describe additional events that I (or the broader literature base) might consider racial microaggressions. However, according to the initial appraisal of participants, none of these incidents occurred very frequently.

> Maybe once a year…like it seems like once a year there's something that happens here. -Kevin

This sentiment was reinforced by the other members in the group.

A Critical Race Intervention: Naming Racial Microaggressions

In 2001, after hearing a presentation given at the University of Michigan by Professors Daniel Solórzano and Walter Allen on racial microaggressions – a high school student in the audience addressed the UCLA professors with a heart-wrenching admission. "She was crying," says Professor Solórzano…,"The first thing she said when she spoke was, 'You've given me a name for my pain…' If you asked a person on the street about racial microaggressions, they would probably say, 'What are you talking about?' But if you asked them, 'Has anyone ever said something to you like this…?' they would say, 'Yes.' When you explain the experience and give it a name, it can be a pretty powerful tool."- Daniel Solórzano interviewed by Joanie Harmon, 2016

I was confused during the SFG students' discussion about the frequency of their racial experiences. In the course of our previous conversation I heard the young men describe *several* racial encounters they had endured during what was the current academic term. Additionally, readers will recall that Taron, a freshman, shared that he had experienced the "doorway denial" more than once within his first few months at UCLA. After witnessing the mismatch between

their actual experiences and understanding of these events, I felt it was prudent (and, as a

Critical Race scholar, critically important) to share one of the definitions of everyday racism

guiding the study. I provided them with Solórzano and Perez-Huber's (2015) definition of racial

microaggressions:

> *Everyday manifestations of racism that People of Color encounter in their public
> and private lives. These…assaults can be verbal (or nonverbal), behavioral, and
> environmental and are often based on not only a Person of Color's race/ethnicity
> but also how they intersect with other real or perceived differences of gender,
> class, sexuality, language, immigration status, accent, or surname. (Perez Huber
> and Solórzano, 2015, pg.)*

I also shared with the students that in research, the "micro" in microaggressions is not meant to

indicate the size or amount of impact, but rather the everyday, incessant, and mundane

characteristics (compared to more spectacular manifestations) of the racism encountered. I then

asked the young men if, given this working definition, there were any possible amendments to

the frequency of their everyday racial encounters. The ensuing conversation featured interesting

alterations in the students' perceptions of their experiences.

> I still think the frequency of those different interactions here is a little harder to
> pinpoint. But I guess it's just a lot of like people make tone-deaf or culturally
> insensitive comments, like more to lessen your presence. But I don't think those
> incidents have happened that frequent. Maybe if I'm in a study group you might
> get an interaction with that but I don't think it's been too much of an issue here.
> -Eric

> *(In response)*

> I think it kind of depends on the environment and also how I feel like I'm
> portraying myself on any given day…I'm involved in athletics program here and
> during season I'm required to have on a certain backpack 'cause of sponsorships.
> So, I look more like an athlete or I'm affiliated with the team. When I go to
> classes people will be more likely to sit next to me or talk to me and they'll be
> like, 'Oh, are you on the football team?' I'm like, 'Oh no, I work for them.' And
> they'll be like, 'Oh! Do you know [well-known UCLA athlete]?' And they'll
> really talk to me and I'll get their numbers, they'll invite me to study with
> them…In a non-sexual way. But in post-season I actually switched my backpacks
> and I kind of just stopped wearing certain gear, kind of purposely, 'cause I just

didn't want to be labeled as just an athlete or whatever. And this really has been a different experience. 'Cause I've been taking classes and like if I sit down, I'll be alone 'cause you know I'll be one of the only Black people. And [white] people won't even come sit next to me. Nobody's coming up talking to me that I haven't met before. I'd have to be wearing some [athletic] gear in order to get any love. -Taron

I think, it's just how you portray yourself in this campus and you know even in the city when I wear my UCLA shirt out, like when I'm in LA, I get treated differently than if I don't. You know like, I feel like in stores I'm left alone more and there's almost like more respect from the owner versus if I'm wearing a hoodie and walking, even on campus. If I'm just in sweats and a hoodie, late at night with some of my friends who are African-American I feel like [other students] almost look at us like, 'Oh do they even go here. What are they doing walking around this late?' So, I think that plays a part. -Dwight

I remember one time, it was with one of my friends and they're not Black. We were in Ackerman (student center) and I had just [told my friend about] this one drink I like to order. And when they went up there to order, the cashier just took their order and they took their card and swiped it. That's it, you know. Then I went up to order right after my friend and they're like, 'Oh, are you a student here?' and I'm just like, 'Damn, that's crazy.' But, I mean I didn't notice it in the moment. But now I look back at it like oh maybe that was something. -Kevin

As this interaction reveals, the students in the SFG were able to recognize the ambiguous racialized attacks after being informed by a more precise definition of racial microaggressions. This represented a significant shift in the conversation as the young men said they felt *permission* to call these experiences racist. Additionally, their naming of the events was also altered. More specifically, I asked the students what they would call these later incidents and Ono provided an illuminative response:

I'll consider for mine, I will say it was a microaggression and I say so just because like the fact that you know, all the stories we told we still remember them, 'cause they did have an effect on us. Like even though like, I know mine was relatively small, but it's the fact that I still remember. I mean it still affected me since that was like a year ago and I can still think about it. -Ono

Summary of SFG Appraisals:

139

In summation, the participants with shorter telomeres were less likely than their LFG peers to recognize everyday experiences with ambiguous racism and were very reluctant to indict even overt instances of white supremacy as "racist." Their hesitation seemingly stemmed from being unable to decipher and confirm actual malevolent intent on behalf of the would-be aggressors. Despite their hesitation in labeling these instances "microaggressions," the SFG participants offered appraisals that (nomenclature aside) essentially described mundane racism. All of these incidents could be classified as interpersonal microaggressions and were more overt and less ambiguous, relative to the incidents reported by the LFG. Even still, these students were far more measured in their appraisal of racial encounters compared to their LFG peers. While the LFG students identified 36 different locations of everyday racism on campus, the SFG students tracked racist occurrences across 4 spaces. The SFG students also initially said that the events occurred about once a year. I offered a formal definition of racial microaggressions in response to a few inconsistencies in the SFG students' reporting. Equipped with this definition, the students felt free to name more instances they encountered as racist. The young men went on to appraise a few ambiguous circumstances as microaggressions because they were able to remember the events despite their best efforts to forget them.

Telomere-Distinguished Socialization and Appraisal Findings

As previously mentioned, the LFG and SFG participants reported receiving distinct racial socialization that prepared them for pervasive antiblack racism and unspecific harm, respectively. Analysis of the present data suggests the students' microaggression appraisals are also rooted in this racial socialization. For instance, when I asked each focus group about the racialized events they experienced on campus I was most interested in how they described the attacks, where they occurred, and how often they registered the incidents of racism. The two

groups were distinguished by their disparate capabilities in registering and naming the more

ambiguous and mundane manifestations of antiblackness. There is a definitive schism between

how the students in the SFG and LFG appraise everyday racism. This is unsurprising given the

differences of perspectives between the two groups on the minimum requirements for what

constitutes a racist moment and/or a form of everyday racism.

According to the LFG students, racism is baked into the very structure of the institution.

With this starting point, the students in the LFG tracked everyday racism through their internal

registry of potentially racial moments, policies, and procedures. In other words, their appraisals

of microaggressions hinged on the extent to which they felt negatively impacted by somewhat

ambiguous interpersonal, institutional, and structural encounters. Guided by this "impact-

centered" northern star, the LFG students understood they were vulnerable to microaggressions

anytime they engaged non-Black people, policies, or places.

The SFG students did not consider UCLA inherently racist due to historical or structural

positioning. For them, the presence or absence of racism was largely dependent upon

perceivable, explicit, and intentional racial discrimination. Accordingly, these students sought

out connections with non-Black people, places, and points of policy deployment on campus.

Unsurprisingly, throughout these engagements, the students registered a number of questionable

instances. They described myriad manifestations of racism on UCLA's campus, ranging from

clear and pernicious displays of white supremacy to more oblique, mundane yet still corrosive,

antiblack sentiments. All of these incidents were interpersonal in nature. However, The SFG

expressed general uncertainty about the nature of their racial encounters and registered far fewer

microaggressions compared to their LFG peers. Their conceptualization of the events and

exposure to racial violence were directly tied to their (desired and casual) encounters with white people.

The insight gained from this chapter offer important elaborations on the Phase I findings and are helpful in updated Solórzano and Perez-Huber's (2015) model for Understanding and Analyzing Racial Microaggressions. Table 5.1 provides a visual summary of the chapter findings.

Table 5.1

Appraisal	LFG	SFG
Type(s)	Interpersonal, Institutional, and Structural Racial Microaggressions	Interpersonal and Overt, possibly racial events
Context	Embedded and Ubiquitous Across Campus (36 + locations)	Four locations across campus
Frequency	Multiple times daily pending interactions (or lack thereof) with non-Blacks	Rare. Pending how one carries oneself

Recall that Solórzano and Perez-Huber's model (Figure 5.1) was updated earlier in the chapter (p. 14-15) through the addition of "Frequency" to the model and subsequently collapsing Type(s), Context, and Frequency into a collective Appraisal dimension (Figure 5.5.).

Figure 5.1 Revisited
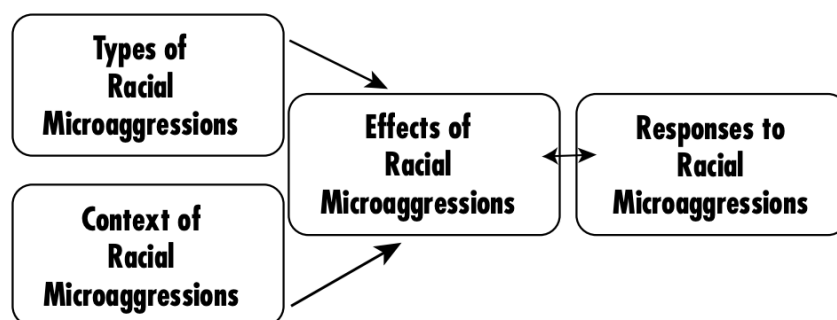
Figure 5.4 Revisited
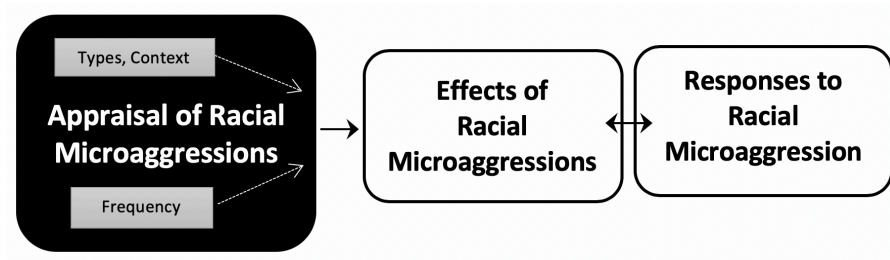
The data and analysis of this chapter offer helpful information in further expanding the model. As previously discussed, the participants' appraisal processes are informed by their racial socialization. Figure 5.8 adds racial socialization as the roots for racial microaggression appraisals.

Figure 5.7
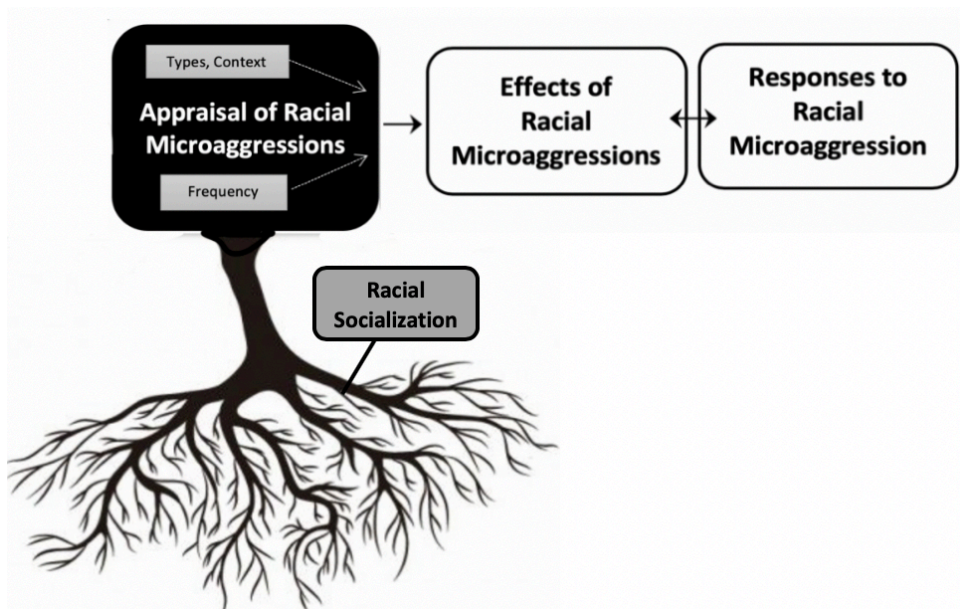
CRT reminds us that the racial socialization messages are necessary (and exist) specifically because Black parents, caretakers, and youth exist within a world predicated on antiblackness (Dumas and Ross, 2016). Racial microaggressions are the violent everyday reminders and reifiers of that foundation (i.e. the historical and contemporary suffering of Black people). Thus,

regardless of how Black parents and caretakers equip their children to navigate everyday

racism (i.e. the articulation of socialization), the fact such socialization is necessary at all

emanates from the embedded antiblackness that gives life to the toxic environment (Watson,

2019). This antiblack foundation serves as the bedrock in the Updated Model for Understanding

Racial Microaggressions.

Figure 5.8

An Updated Model for Understanding Racial Microaggressions v.2
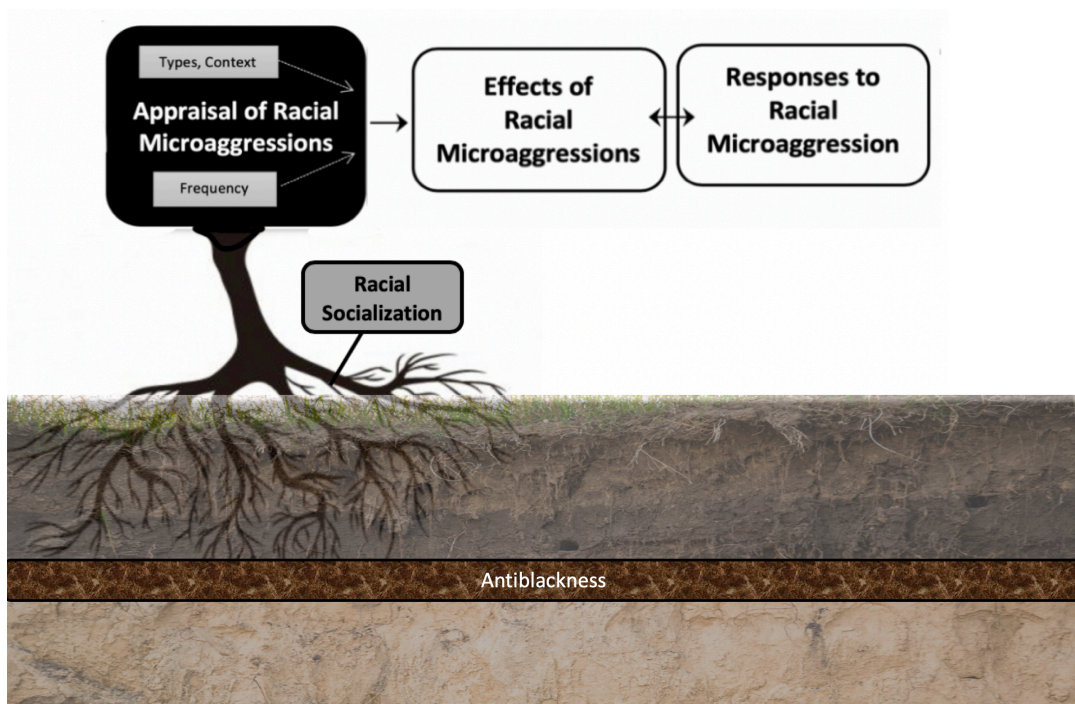
I utilize this Updated Model to situate the focus group data into two telomere-distinguished

process models (Figures 5.10 and 5.11) below. These process models highlight (in yellow) and

exhibit the current dissertation findings regarding Black collegiate men's telomere lengths,

socialization experiences, and appraisal processes.

Figure 5.9 A Microaggression Process Model (Longer Telomeres)
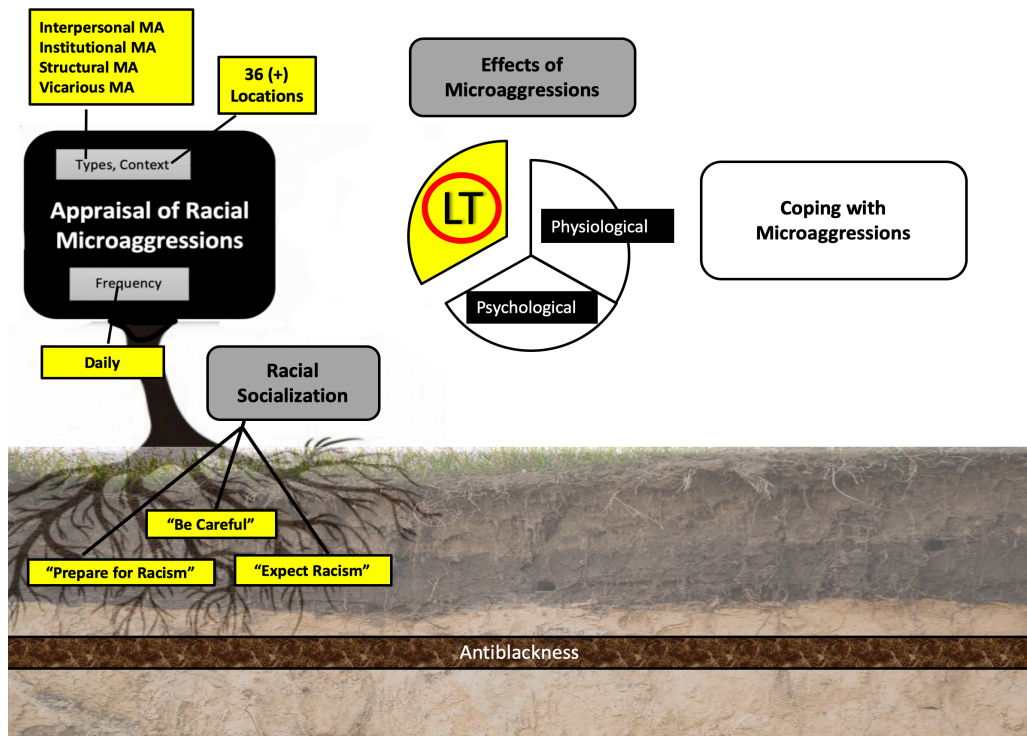
Figure 5.10 A Microaggression Process Model (Shorter Telomeres)
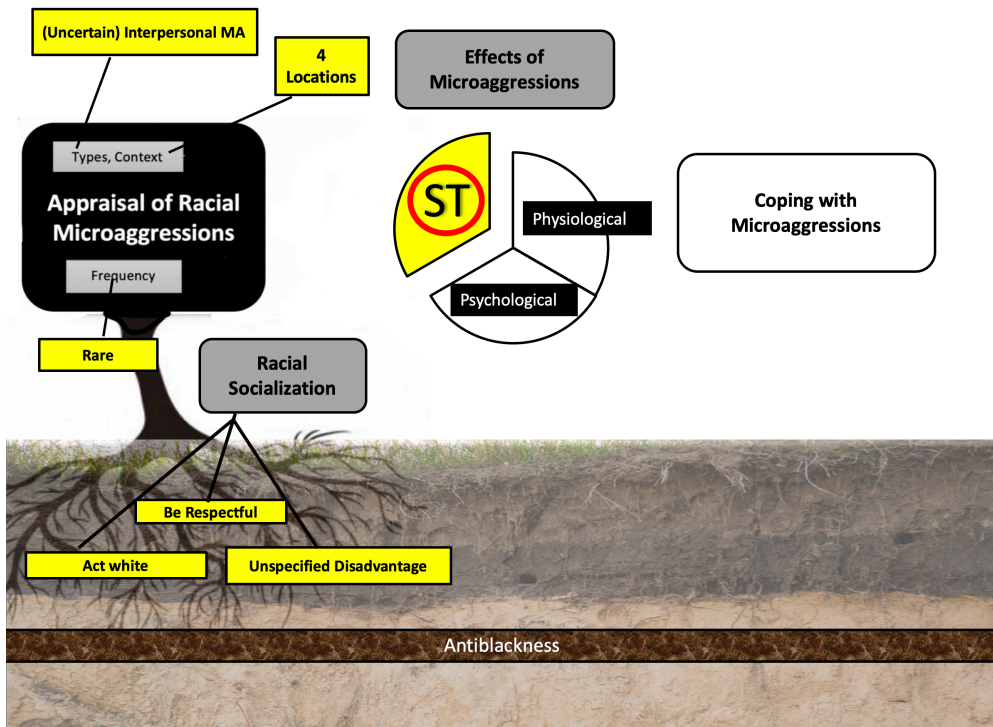
These process models suggest that racial socialization is involved in racial microaggression appraisals. Additionally, there are distinct racial socialization and appraisal processes engaged by telomere length. Within the model, telomere length is considered a biomarker indicative of long-term health outcomes. It is one component of the triangulated **effects** domain. This domain also includes *physiological* and *psychological* effects of race-related stress (or racial microaggression stress).[15] The dissertation study is primarily concerned with the telomere-length component of racial microaggression effects and does not directly investigate more acute physiological or psychological consequences of race-related stress. Note also that "Responses" in Solórzano and Perez-Huber's (2015) has been changes to "Coping" in the current process model. This change reflects literature across fields (Psychology and Health) that operationalizes the ways in which individuals "respond" to racism as their coping. Additionally, these Process Models are not grounded in tests of relationships between variables and are not intended to confirm causal pathways between any of the items on the model. Instead, the models utilize descriptive, and collective focus group data to exhibit and describe how Black men distinguished within the study sample by telomere lengths are processing everyday racism. In the spirit of Solórzano and Perez-Huber's original Model, the expanded Model for Understanding Racial Microaggressions as well as these Microaggression Process Models are intended to be employed as useful tool in addressing Question 2 and 2a (most presently).

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[15] Recall that documented physiological effects (or responses in most Psychological and Public Health literature) stemming from racism-related stress includes negative impacts on autoimmune, neuroendocrine, and cardiovascular functioning (Brondolo et al., 2009). Common stress-induced physiological harm includes overactive lowered immune system functioning and increased susceptibility to disease (S. Cohen and Herbert, 1996); hyperactivation of the pituitary-adrenocortical and hypothalamic-sympathetic-adrenal (HPA) medullary systems (Burchfield, 1979; Herd, 1991) and subsequent dysregulation of the "flight or fight" stress hormones (such as epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol); and increased cardiac activity (possibly leading to heart disease) (Clark et al., 1999). Common psychological effects of everyday racism include, anger, paranoia, anxiety, helplessness-hopelessness, hypervigilance, frustration, resentment, fear, depression, etc. (Armstead et al., 1989; Bullock and Houston, 1987).

Question 2 of this dissertation study is: *What racial socialization messages and appraisals of racial microaggressions are utilized by Black collegiate men with varied telomere lengths?* The two-tiered telomere focus group data suggest that Black men with longer telomeres received protective racial socialization messages from their families that prepared them to anticipate and navigate an antiblack world. In turn, these young men readily recognized that they encountered mundane, spectacular, and veiled racism throughout interpersonal, institutional, and structural domains at UCLA. The LFG participants felt the impact of these microaggressions daily and located them on more than 36 distinct locations on campus.

Conversely, the focus group participants with shorter telomeres received protective socialization messages from their families that encouraged them to be respectable and utilize white normative strategies to navigate an unspecified threat of future disadvantage. Moreover, although the young men experienced numerous racist events on UCLA's campus they were hesitant to name them as such. These participants were unsure if incidents could be considered racist in the absence of others' perceivable malevolent intentions. Given these criteria, the SFG participants reported infrequent encounters with possible interpersonal racial prejudice across 4 locations on campus. However, the SFG students recalled additional ambiguous events and appraised them as racism after they were provided with literature-based definition of racial microaggressions.

With the collective findings for Questions 1 and 2, this TSMM study has revealed several important components of the biopsychosocial impact of Racial Microaggressions on a group of Black collegiate men. However, as is evident from the developing Updated Model for Understanding Racial Microaggressions and the Microaggressions process model, there is more

to understand regarding how Black men cope with everyday racism. The next chapter concerns

the coping and response mechanisms of the LFG and SFG participants.

Chapter 6

Micro-Management: Coping with the Mundane Facts of Blackness[1]

The idea that you can go through a storm and come out unchanged, is a magically-lethal-negro'ism. In my honest opinion, American Black culture places a premium on the silent struggle. And we pay for it in hypertension, depression, anger, self-hate, psychosis, etc…The ability to endure that struggle is an amazing quality of our culture. But the need to create struggle, especially when calm is available is our shadow. Shit. Storms fuck shit up! The wind snaps trees. Water made the Grand Canyon. And streams will polish the hardest stones into dust. You can be on that ole "struggle'in'silence" type ish if you wanna. For me, though, I've invested in an umbrella, galoshes, and a raincoat…Fuck a needless struggle. -Derek, 2013

This excerpt is from a 2013 facebook post written by Derek, a student who participated in an Intergroup Dialogue class on Black Men I led during my master's program at Penn State University. As is evident, Derek is profoundly gifted at naming the realities of everyday racism. His analysis also serves as a powerful analogization of the social embodiment of racial trauma and poetically echoes the concept of "weathering" (Geronimus, 1992) discussed in Chapter 2. Derek offers a compelling rejoinder to the quotidian violence of antiblackness, proclaiming his investment in materials specifically designed to protect their wearers from the noxious elements of racism. In the present chapter, I draw inspiration from Derek's apt analogy in an endeavor to further understand the ways in which a group of Black men's management of (i.e. responses to and coping with) microaggressions may map onto their differentially weathered telomeres.

This chapter also concludes Phase II of the larger Transformative Sequential Mixed

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[1] "The Fact of Blackness" is the fifth chapter in *Black Skin, White Mask*, Frantz Fanon's (1952) exhumation of the deeply embedded sociogenic psychosis that animates antiblack racial amicus. Towards this endeavor, Fanon surgically scaffolds the lived experiences of Black men in the Fact of Blackness. I borrowed part of the title for this dissertation chapter because, although Fanon's work has been utilized throughout my study, the present entry concerns the ways in which Black men navigate antiblackness. Thus, this chapter is, consequently, most directly related to Fanon's efforts in *Facts.* In addition to the namesake, the present chapter features several passages either directly from Fanon himself or closely aligned with Fanonian observations. These passages serve as an intentional, simultaneous subtext, aimed at offering a Fanon-inspired unearthing intervention in what might be understood as a part of the Undercommons (Moten and Harney, 2013) of this dissertation study.

Method study through a continuing qualitative analysis of the focus group data in consideration

of Question 2a: **What might we learn from the Black males' coping strategies in light of**

their varied telomere lengths (effects)? Coping strategies have been described as individual or

collective efforts to address, endure, and/or alleviate problems and stress (Lazarus and Folkman,

1984). Empirical observations of the deleterious impact of race-related stress (such as racial

microaggressions) have spurred robust investigations into *race-related* coping. Question 2a

emerged in response to this extant literature base and its disparate notions of what constitutes

healthy management approaches in the face of everyday racism.

For example, proactive racial socialization messages that encourage accurate appraisals

in defense against racism have been lauded as protective interventions for Black individuals

navigating quotidian antiblackness (Stevenson, 2014). However, several entries in the racial

stress literature have uncovered strong correlations between expressions of poorer mental health

(i.e. anxiety, depression, paranoia, etc.) and so-called "hypervigilant" coping mechanisms such

as anticipating and avoiding everyday racial discrimination (Lee and Hicken, 2016; Utsey and

Payne, 2000).). Other empirical work suggests these responses (or dispositions) help stave off the

negative physiological outcomes associated with racial stress (Smith, Hung, and Franklin, 2011).

Further complicating these findings are contradictory research paradigms that laud the health

benefits (and decry the negative health outcomes) of anger expression compared to denying and

ignoring racism (Pieterse, et al., 2012). Moreover, racial stress coping research in its most

current and updated manifestations continues to frame responses to racism through a

dichotomous "adaptive" and "maladaptive" lens (Williams, 2016). As Harrell (2000) notes,

there are no uniformly acclaimed racism management strategies; especially in regards to

ambiguous forms of racism. This chapter seeks to address these gaps and contradictions through

a comparative, qualitative analysis of the participants coping mechanisms.

Data Analysis

With this goal in mind, I am utilizing an identical methodology from the previous chapter with an adjusted focus on how the participants coped with everyday racism. Once again, I draw upon the two-tiered focus group interview data and employ Creswell's (2007) suggested steps for qualitative data analysis. This includes 1). Creating a listing of important statements from each interview, 2). Creating a description of the "what" or the "textural description" of the experience, 3). Building on the list of important statements by sorting these into themes, 4). Creating a description of the experience, including the "how" of the participants' journey; This also includes the "structural description" (Creswell, 2007; p 0.159), 5. Constructing a description that incorporates both the textural and structural; sharing the experiences as perceived. The textural description includes "significant statements and themes." The "context and setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007).

The data presented in this chapter stem from the participants' discussion of coping with everyday racism. I studied their responses and coded for commonalities and differences among the two focus groups. Analyzing the data in this way yielded distinctive racism management orientations between the focus groups: **Racially Permanent** and **Racially Permeable Strategies.**

Roadmap

This chapter is organized by the themes that emerged in conversation with the (telomere-arranged) participants. I discuss these thematic findings through a comparative analysis of the perspectives shared within the two focus groups. I begin the chapter by describing and analyzing distinguishing components of the two coping approaches of students in the LFG followed by

students in the SFG. I then incorporate the emerging knowledge into an empirically updated

version of Solórzano and Perez-Huber's Model for Understanding and Analyzing Racial

Microaggressions. The final component of the chapter features a preliminary discussion of these

implications[2] as well as concluding remarks on the questions explored through this

Transformative Mixed Method Study.

Racially Permanent Coping of the LFG

As long as the black man remains on his home territory, except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others…but any ontology is made impossible in a colonized and acculturated society. -Frantz Fanon, 1952, p.89

The participants in the LFG offered illuminative accounts of their management of

everyday racism and subsequent coping after an event occurred. The students' reported coping

strategies also seemed to align closely with their racial socialization and appraisal tendencies

described in Chapter 5. Bishop's coping process in anticipating and encountering racial

microaggressions is an apt example of this alignment. I provide an analysis of his strategies

below followed by a discussion of how his process, in combination with the other LFG students,

demonstrates an internalization of the Critical Race Theory concept of Racial Permanence.

Just Walk on By…For as Long as You Can: LFG Evasive Coping Maneuvers

"Look! A Negro!" It was a passing sting. I attempted a smile. "Look! A Negro!" Absolutely. I was beginning to enjoy myself. "Look! A Negro!" The circle was gradually getting smaller. I was really enjoying myself. "Maman, look, a Negro; I'm scared!" Scared! Scared! Now they were beginning to be scared of me. I wanted to kill myself laughing, but laughter had become out of the question. -Frantz Fanon, 1952, p. 91

For me this happens on a daily, so I'm prepped for it in the morning. You know, I'll be ready…You know, my walls built up. I'm ready. I could take a few hits. - Bishop

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[2] I offer a more thorough engagement in Chapter 7

From the onset of his coping narrative, it appears Bishop's *damned if you do* racial

socialization and *cloak-sensitive* appraisal serve as the foundation of his response process.

Equipped with the expectation that racism is endemic to environments outside of his home,

Bishop anticipates experiencing racism at UCLA. His protective, anticipatory coping orientation

seems to align with the racial preparatory messages we learned of in the previous chapter. In

anticipation of expected racism, Bishop says he constructs a psychological, defensive "wall"

every morning as a protective buttress against the oncoming and inevitable attacks.

> But by the time like the middle of the day comes by and I walk by one person, it
> happens. I notice it. It doesn't go unnoticed. I notice it every time. And then it
> happens again. Yesterday it happened three times walking from the Art Center to
> go from one class to another. It was about a five-minute walk to lecture and it
> happened to me like twice. -Bishop

This internal barrier is challenged upon his arrival on campus. Once he gets to UCLA, Bishop is

exposed to interpersonal microaggressions that manifest as individuals checking their pockets

when he passes them by. This particular attack on his psyche occurs several times within a

matter of a few minutes. Again, echoing the LFG appraisal findings, Bishop "notices" (i.e.

recognizes) the ambiguous racism *as racism*, in real time, at each (multiple) instance.

> So, it gets to the point that you know in the moment, where it's like, alright
> "whatever," alright laugh it off, alright just shove it. But then at the point where
> like it happens too frequently, I really, really, really, really feel like, in that
> moment, if I don't say something that it's going to continue to persist. I then have
> to realize like, do I engage it when it happens? Or do I just, you know, cause
> what works better for me is to laugh at it and to point at how miniscule and like
> how funny it is in the moment cause of the ignorance. So, I know, it does take a
> toll overtime. -Bishop

Unfortunately, anticipating and noticing these racial events does not render them

inconsequential. Thus, Bishop recounts how he employed several interrelated, evasive coping

maneuvers (*laughs* it off, renders it *minuscule*, *shoves* it) in response to the wave of racial

assaults he endured during his short walk between classes. However, Bishop's shield and the

protective capacities of his evasive tactics eventually erode due to the accumulation of incessant

racial assaults that, "take a toll overtime."

> So, after the 4th time in a row, I'm usually like, ok the next time it happens, I'm
> gonna tell somebody about themselves. And there's been times where I do say
> something. I'll be like, "So what you checking your pocket for?" You know what
> I'm saying? I feel like, ultimately, if I don't do anything or say anything, it only
> makes it worse for myself. Cause I'm the only one that deals with it when I go
> home and has to unpack it, you know. They (the microaggressors) don't ever have
> unpack it. -Bishop

After sustaining palpable damage Bishop is forced to revise his coping maneuvers. He utilizes

pointed inquiry as an active countermeasure to confront and expose the otherwise unnamed

microaggression. However, it is important to note that Bishop verbally challenged the

microaggression only as a stopgap measure against immediate and long-term harm. He

intervened in recognition that unpacking (i.e. discharging) the incident at a later time would be

more difficulty if he didn't challenge the racism more directly in the moment.

As we learned in Chapter 5, Bishop (and other students in the LFG) received racial

socialization that favored expecting and preparing for racism. Additionally, like other members

of the LFG, Bishop appraised racial microaggressions as occurring frequently across numerous

contexts. His racial coping process is reflective of his internalization of these preparatory

messages and evidenced appraisals. In summation, Bishop anticipates and prepares for racial

harm by constructing a psychological wall each morning before leaving his home. Despite this

proactive defensive maneuver, Bishop notices and endures frequent microaggressions that erode

his mental firewall with each hit. This erosion eventually leads to increased frustration and an

impetus to act. Bishop's coping process shifts from anticipatory preparation to passive response

measures intended to divert, minimize, and suffocate racial harm. However, the sheer frequency

of the microaggressions causes Bishop to self-triage and evaluate the damage he's sustained;

necessitating the employment of more active coping responses (i.e. direct challenge) to interrupt

the proximal harm and limit subsequent repair efforts. This summary of Bishop's coping process

reveals a pattern that is informative in understanding the broader strategies of students in the

LFG.

Like Bishop, the other students in the LFG anticipated that they would experience racism

by virtue of their encounters with nonBlacks.

> This goes back to [the extent] of my involvement on campus. If and when I leave
> my room I'm aware people are going to have a hard time not being racist or like
> doing something against me. - Derrick

In affirmation of their anticipation (and once again echoing Chapter 4 and 5 findings), the LFG

participants recognized microaggressions at each instance of deployment.

> I keep a list when it happens…I would say you just kind of like, check them off
> each time…Every time…You just check it on the list. -Temi

These students also utilized more passive coping measures such as minimizing and diverting

(shoving) when initially confronting everyday racism. However, just as Bishop's psychological

wall eroded due to incessant racial attacks, the other LFG students reported a similar *wearing*

down of their anticipatory defenses catalyzed by the frequency or intensity of the attacks they

endured. For example, Savoka's "brushing it off" was overwhelmed by how often he was

assumed to be a threat.

> …you know the one thing that always gets to me is how much it comes up. Like
> outside of UCLA in Westwood where you're around white- where you're around
> like White women and they clench their purse. I always hear about that but as the
> older I'd gotten and you know probably like the bigger I got as well. Like I feel
> like I intimidate folks, White folks based off my- just the way I look and it's hard
> to deal with, especially like going to a space like work you know. And I could be
> wearing a suit, I could be dressed up even and to still be looked at a certain way
> and I could be you know this, this and that, doing X, Y, Z but like the person who
> I'm probably potentially trying to work with is afraid of me. And it doesn't stop.
> So, it's hard to deal with by just brush- trying to brush it off. – Savoka

Additionally, despite expecting to hear racism, Ryan was caught off guard by the severity of

witnessing his peers say the N-word.

> One thing that happened towards the end of my time with my team was there was
> a Snapchat group that we were all in it and people would send videos all the time
> and I kinda just, I would watch them to like, I don't know, like see what they're
> doing. And one time, one of my [white] team members was taking a video with
> one of the other [white] members and I definitely heard them say the N word to, I
> think it was maybe along to a song that was playing in like the basketball stadium
> or something along those lines. And I wasn't there in person with them, but I saw
> that and I just—I just felt like that was going to happen at some point… I was like
> waiting...I was waiting for that moment to happen 'cause I knew it would… and
> like I was just immediately like angry…I was so upset and like still surprised to
> hear them say it, even though, honestly, I expected it to happen at some point. -
> Ryan

Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, several of the students mentioned coping with

racism through avoidance strategies. They avoided sites of racist encounters and would leave the

spaces when the threat of racial challenges exceeded their coping strategies.

> The snapchat thing occurred towards the end of my time with the team. I was
> already kind of just falling off and I was tired of the whole thing. I felt like it was
> just like not meant for me and-- it wasn't my cup of tea…And I just like I left the
> group like a week after I saw the video. I told the captain I was like, "I'm done
> with this. It's over." And I left for good. - Ryan

Thus, the LFG students' coping with racism seem to unfold in a perceivable sequence of

management. Informed by preparatory racial socialization, the young men anticipate racist

attacks, readily appraise microaggressions when they occur, and attempt to divert and/or avoid

such encounters in order to lessen their harmful impact. Despite this legible pattern, closer

examination of the students' racism management maneuvers reveals yet another lingering

concern emanating from the dissertation study.

Days of Future Past: LFG Coping Beyond (Spatial and Temporal) Loci of Control

> *[According to Fanon],…the colonized world, demands that they have a sovereign*
> *right over violence. [This means] they can use whatever violence they want for*
> *their own needs; whether to get oil, or to repress Black liberation. That violence*

is always characterized, narrativized as legitimate. And it enters <u>our minds</u> as a legitimate form of violence. So, any type of response to that…has two problems. One…is actually a tactical problem of finding the…paramilitary capacity to fight state violence. And two…is finding a way to legitimate your own response to that violence <u>in your own head</u> first, and in the heads of people like you second, and then in the heads of the rest of the world. -Frank Wilderson, 2015

So, like in coping, man, I expect it to happen. You try to prepare. But then it does and you try to, like I said, just brush it off. I think I've always been good at that, I mean I'm not saying that's a good characteristic. And that definitely does have some wear and tear to kind of walk around campus and know people are afraid of you. They're always like spooked when I come around the corner. But what can you do? They're already scared. If I say something that's another cause for alarm and for UCPD to get involved. Like that's a real threat. For what? I think as a Black man who's susceptible to a lot of mental issues. I believe that it's important that I go out and talk to somebody about it but for the most part, I just brush it off and keep it pushing. - Savoka

In accordance with the previously observed pattern, Savoka anticipates racism, recognizes when he's experiencing microaggressions, and engages evasive maneuvers in response. These microaggressions accumulate and cascade. Like Bishop, Savoka acknowledges that the recurrent microaggressions overwhelm his evasive coping strategies. However, unlike Bishop, Savoka does <u>not</u> shift his management of the microaggression towards a more active or direct interruption in response to the frequency. He claims that doing so would be both dangerous and, ultimately, futile. According to Savoka, although the microaggressions he encounters are technically interpersonal, they are actually bolstered by the threat of institutional and structural power embodied by white individuals he encounters in white spaces. Thus, the individual white people who fear his body are in fact alarm-equipped avatars of a massive, antiblack collective that they could galvanize for violent means against the young man if they feel more threatened. Savoka knows an attempt at intervention in the space could cause him further, potentially irreparable harm.

The threat of retaliatory violence also impacted the coping mechanisms of additional

LFG participants. Several students said they were reticent to directly challenge microaggressions

regardless of their frequency or severity because doing so might incur more immediately dire

repercussions.

> When I do check people, it is also hard to keep your emotions in check. So
> sometimes in the moment, you feel like "oh, let me just not jump down your
> throat," you know, there's probably a better way. - Bishop

> I wasn't there to say something in person to [the people who used the N-word on
> Snapchat]. I was thinking I need to say something or at least go off on them on the
> phone in the group Snapchat or whatever. Then I was thinking, like, "fuck," ---I
> couldn't jump in on that one because I was so upset and had missed the
> opportunity to say something in the moment. In the long term, I wish-- I regret not
> saying anything to them because like that just can't-- if it goes unchecked, like
> others were saying before, it's something that obviously creates negative health
> outcomes for us as Black people. But we also have to think about how to respond
> to someone that says the N-word…and how go about it the right way. You have to
> think about [nonBlack peoples'] feelings and how they're going to respond to
> you. I was so over trying to figure that math out. That's why I was just like, "fuck
> it" and left the team. But in retrospect, I wish I had said something. I shouldn't
> have to cater to their feelings about what I have to say about it because it affects
> me -Ryan

Ryan seems to be experiencing the grenade effect[3] of microaggressions. This phenomenon is

distinguished as the particular aftermath common amongst targets of everyday racism who are

not able to respond to the incident in the moment (Cueva, 2013). Similar to Savoka, Ryan's

would-be intervention had been circumvented by the threat of retaliatory white violence. In

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[3] Dr. Bert Cueva (2013) introduced the concept of the "grenade effect" in her dissertation study documenting the
psychological and physiological impact of racial microaggressions on Indigenous and Chicana women doctoral
students. Luna, a doctoral student who participated in Cueva's study, used the term in a painful testimonio of being
repeatedly abused by her white female thesis advisor. Speaking about this advisor, Luna said, "She was a bully and
manipulative... In just thinking of her, I would become ill. At times, in class, I would have to use the bathroom and
she would even challenge that. Her intolerant behavior was undeniable…Most of the things that she would say to
me, I called the **Grenade Effect**. In other words, she would say it and I would not be sure how to respond to it; it
would be awkward and shocking to me. Then it would hit me later and I would be like 'wow that was really racist,
painful and inappropriate of her to say to me!' I endured her unethical behavior for years, until I finally changed
advisers."

addition to the threat of retaliatory consequences, several LFG students claimed that the

microaggressions overwhelmed their ability to respond precisely because they were tied to

previous racist encounters endured by their parents and ancestors.

Transmitted Memory

The problem of which we speak is one of time.[4]-Frantz Fanon, 1952, p.176

...a lady in a Pullman car ordered me to bring her a glass of water, mistaking me for a porter, the incident in its essence was a joke to be chuckled over; but in its hard, cruel significance and its unending inescapable sign of slavery, it was something to drive a man mad -W.E.B. DuBois, 1940, p.136-137

I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. – Frantz Fanon, 1952, p. 92

The trip is, when everything happened, I was thinking about my dad and how he got called [nigger] so many times in the [19]80's. He tells me about like hearing that when he was pushed down in the sand or when he was like hung up on a tree behind his back and like just all of his dignity is taken away. So where do you put that emotion and pain that is very real and is tied to that word for me personally? How do I navigate that and reasonably challenge a white person on snapchat who just says nigga thinking, it's just in a song, It's way too different…they think it's just in a song. That's an incredibly ignorant and simplified version of really thinking about it in a deeply complex way. Like hearing these dumb white people rap the N-word, I am like immediately connected to my father's life. I felt like I couldn't completely put all that into one response to such a thing that they would think is a small like scenario or kind of instance. I would go off. So, I just said fuck it and left the team -Ryan

In response

These are truly mnemonic attacks. And mnemonic triggers bring you back in time. It's literally time travel. And it's not as if it's some science fiction or...No. It brings you back to a time and a space. Like, loud sounds. Like I said, my father was in the military. He has PTSD. And like I said, he jumps back into time like he's right back on the ship cause of loud sounds and things that his brain has held in it's hard drive. And in a sense, like, you can't take those experiences away from people. And I believe in transmitted memory. Like we have that knowledge. My grandmother has books of our family's history that has been tracked back. Like my dad used to go to the plantation and pick walnuts and cotton during his

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[4] See *Quantum Blackanics: Untimely Blackness, and Black Literature Out of Nowhere,* Dr. John Murrillo III's (2016) powerful dissertation study for a more holistic meditation on (anti)Blackness and "time."

summer [as a child]. So, it wasn't that far ago. And we know the lineage of where our family's history is. So, when you know that, the stronger the memory that becomes. You know, you start to connect the reasons why you were in Louisiana in the summer. Things start to make more sense to you and the time travel becomes more solid. Without the knowing, memory can be elusive or faulty you know. And it's harder to recognize. You want to know why you have flashbacks sometimes or de ja vu, and feel as if you've been somewhere before? It's because a part of you has [been there]. Being policed, watched, tracked…when people check their pockets… I've been there through my family. So these microaggressions are, like Ryan is saying, mnemonic triggers that hit you right where they're meant to, right where it hurts, whether the individual representative of the system wants it to or not. - Bishop

Both Bishop and Ryan frame the racism they endured as tethered to a previous temporal space. In other words, although the microaggressions manifest in the present-day as mundane disregard or ignorance, these students are appraising, and, to a certain extent experiencing, the racism as mnemonic assaults from the vantage point (that is to say with the transmitted knowledge) of their forbearers and ancestors. As Bishop suggests, these attacks are particularly harmful precisely because they emanate quite literally from the history of slavery and sharecropping his family was subjected to. Because these students have knowledge of the temporal coordinates of various racial microaggressions they are reluctant to directly respond to the present-day manifestations of the events. They are faced with several interrelated challenges. First, understanding microaggressions as attacks stemming from and targeting their familial history of suffering impedes on their ability to offer what would be accepted as *reasonable* responses in civil society. In fact, they might, rightfully, "blow up" on their aggressors; causing confusion and most likely more intensified attacks. Secondly, similar to Savoka, Bishop and Ryan see the individuals involved in any given microaggression as interchangeable surrogates of a much larger, pervasive, *older* and powerful antiblack system. This system is simply supported by (and is decidedly *not* holistically reliant on) the agents of everyday racism.

160

With these caveats, the young men in the LFG felt active coping by way of direct

challenge or other forms of education were futile given their feebleness in regards to the actual

problem at hand.

> It's tiring being the teacher. It's not my job to educate you. And, it's not going to
> help me in the long run either way. [The microaggressors] become a better person
> and I'm just using up energy that I should retain for my own well-being. -Derrick

> When someone drops the N-word, I don't say anything because I don't want to go
> through this whole thing of explaining what this word is and why you shouldn't
> say this word ever in any way. And I just don't want to experience, the whole
> back and forth 'cause I live with the daily back and forth anyway. I just
> disengage. -Temi

In addition to these dynamics, the students also shared that the **type** of microaggression they

encounter often impedes them from directly intervening. For example, according to the young

men, everyday racist institutional policies and procedures are also, typically, supported by

significant power. Because of this, the students suggested that their attempts at direct

interruptions would most likely draw unwanted attention; rendering them more vulnerable and

available to harm from powerful forces. When faced with such institutional enactments of

antiblackness, the LFG students relied upon evasion, minimalization, and ultimately, withdrawal.

> I think it definitely depends on who we are interacting with when it comes to
> responding. I think like if it's someone of the same age, same position it's
> different. But for people that have like levels of authority, I kind of just take on
> this like smile and wave kind of situation like with the [coach who discriminated
> against me], I have not said a single thing to him cause like that's not going to
> change anything and he's too high of a power. – Temi

According to the students, even these tactics inevitably fail to resolve the effects of daily racism

they are registering. The young men in the LFG prepare for, recognize, and attempt to evade the

impact of mundane antiblackness. However, their understanding of the scope of the problem has

equipped (anchored) them with depressing knowledge that the assaults are, in more ways than

one, operate from and impact them beyond their locus of control or intervention. In other words,

the LFG students recognized that their initial coping process threshold was overwhelmed by the types of microaggressions they experienced (specifically institutional and structural), the frequency of these events (multiple times daily), the power inherent in the aggressors, and the temporal thread between present day antiblackness and its roots in the more ancient and seemingly permanent antiblack world. Given their racially realistic understanding of the existentialist nature of the threat, the students were forced to alter their coping strategies. In response to (or because of) their consciousness of the ontological crisis embedded within everyday antiblackness, the participants:

1. Removed themselves from settings where they thought racism would occur

- There's not much else we can do besides stay off the main campus. - Savoka
- I avoid places where there aren't at least 3 other Black people. -Derrick

2. Adopted a pessimistic (racially realistic) perspective

- But I just have to keep going back to school and that creates the kind of negative atmosphere that I'm having to cope with. So, I feel like this year, in particular, I just got a lot more cynical than I have ever in my life. I have a much more pessimistic view which is unfortunate, but I thought maybe it's an important change. -Temi

3. Relied on collective support by connecting with other Black friends and family in healing-centered counter spaces

- Being in a peer counseling position, I definitely deal with a lot of other Black student's trauma. I'm still- I'm happy that I do that, that's a big thing that helps me just like to try to offer any support that I can from things I've been through or I just hope like that they can get from- Ryan

- I've been having conversation on the dorm floor with other [Black] students. Like whether it just be about race or really anything. We just talk about whatever. So, when people have like-- if race is like their topic as that day, we'll just go over and listen to people's experiences and just talk. There's not much else we can do besides stay off the main campus- Derrick

- I haven't been able to cope here like I did at home…When institutionalized racism happens, I might talk about it with my brother through a phone call

162

3. Utilized spirituality, rituals, and mindfully engaging their health in preparation for harm.

- More recently, like the racism that I go through, I've been able to pray. I try to you know, put trust in God and figure out more constructive ways in dealing with it never-ending as opposed to like you know, shoving it, or doing some destructive things just to get my mind off of it- Savoka

While the LFG students reported using several of these existential coping strategies in response to the revved up microaggressions, Bishop offers a potential process framework describing why, how, and in what sequence these various responses might be utilized.

> That's why I stay up in the [Black Studies Library]. It's a safe space, you know, whereby you can just be. But by the end of the day I'm done. So, the first thing I do when I get home is smoke a joint (a weed cigarette). And it's interesting because, whereas my girl might smoke maybe to celebrate achievements, I smoke to release. And I do smoke every day. And then I'll explore. So, one of my coping mechanisms that I think I've used within the last year here is painting. I've been painting a lot. When I get stressed, overwhelmed, whether it's testing or micro aggressions or anything on campus, I just-- I literally take the time even if I have something due, I don't even care. I literally put everything else aside, I smoke, and I just give myself some time to literally paint so I realize that that really helps. I make music as well so I use it as my means to express words but not everything comes out in words. Sometimes words don't express sometimes the feelings that happen. So, painting definitely is one of my more coping mechanisms that I've been heavily reliant on in the past two years since I got here at UCLA. Never picked up a paintbrush before. Never. Even still, I feel like regardless of what I do though it does wear on my psyche…to the point that I have to before I go to bed, I prepare myself in the morning before I leave to go to school. You know, to deal with other inherent stressors that aren't school.

Following Bishop's maneuvers throughout the day, we see that his process is informed by an intentional racial socialization that prepared him to navigate the everyday manifestation of antiblackness. According to Bishop's holistic account on his daily process we see that he:

1. Anticipates experiencing racism
2. Prepares and fortifies a psychological wall in anticipation of racial assaults
3. Recognizes multiple microaggressions and employs evasive maneuvers (laughs it off, renders them miniscule, shoves it)
4. Challenges/confronts the microaggressors when possible
5. Seeks out Black spaces on campus/avoids white people and places
6. Smokes weed, paints, and makes music (ritual)

7. Adopts a racially realistic (pessimistic) standpoint
8. Prepares for the racism he will experience the next day.

This process was echoed by students throughout the LFG and serves a Critical Race Grounded (Perez-Huber, Malagon, Velez, 2011) framework for the coping strategies of Black collegiate men with relatively longer telomeres.

Racially Permeable Coping of the SFG

The conversation on coping strategies amongst students in the SFG occurred after the previously mentioned Critical Race Intervention in which I shared a more theoretically grounded definition of racial microaggressions with the participants. Armed with this information, the SFG students provided informative perspectives regarding their approach to managing everyday racism. Similar to their LFG peers, the SFG students' racial management strategies echoed the previously observed socialization and appraisal processes. For instance, in response to queries regarding their coping, the SFG students reiterated that they appraised very few exposures to racism during their time at UCLA. Relatedly, the SFG participants explained that they did not engage in intentional racial coping mechanisms very often. When they recalled experiencing microaggressions, the participants did not feel compelled to engage a specific management technique.

> I feel like my coping, I don't know- I don't really cope with [racism] in specific way. – Kevin

Additionally, and contradictory to their earlier assertions, the students stated that another reason they lacked a specific coping strategy was due to their relative familiarity with white people and *overexposure* to racist experiences.

> I feel like anytime I experience something racial like a microaggression I don't really care about it too much 'cause I'm used to it I guess. I've been going to school with like mostly white people my whole life sop- it's something that I used to and it doesn't even bother me that much- Eric

164

Eric mentioned that he is less sensitive to the potential harm of racism due to his lifelong

proximity to white people in educational spaces. Having grown accustomed to racial

microaggressions, he does not register them as detrimental events in need of intentional

responses. The other students in the focus group nodded and offered verbal affirmations as

Johnathan shared. The young men confirmed that their social connections with white people also

exposed them to frequent racial encounters which they tuned out as a function of habituation.

As the conversation continued, I learned that the SFG students relied on their conversational

aptitude and social flexibility to navigate racialized experiences.

> I feel like I've came to a place in life where I'm really good at maneuvering out of awkwardness through conversation and I think it's really fun, I don't know why-
> Taron

> In those moments when I'm facing [microaggressions] I feel like if it's like- you know how somebody's causing a microaggression but they don't know it. So, I know they just think it's funny or it's a joke. Like when a person says, "Oh wow, I think your hair's so cool, like I always like curly hair, really tight curly hair." I'm like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." You know, like, I would just like probably like make a joke to like meet theirs to just segue way into like a different thing -Ono.

> I just, you know, I just like to blow it off. And that's what I do at the moment. Afterwards it's like, I don't know what it is with me but for whatever reason I feel like I don't really harness a lot of it.– Dwight

Initially, the SFG students' organic, conversational coping maneuvers seem reminiscent of the

LFG students' deliberate, evasive strategies. For instance, both focus groups report that they

utilize humor and diversion tactics in an effort to minimize (blow it off) and defang various

racial attacks. However, a fundamental difference between the two groups emerged as the SFG

students elaborated on their admittedly flippant management of racial encounters.

> I also don't really allow [racial microaggressions] to sit on my mind a lot just because I have some type of underlying belief that it's not- it's really not just about race, because I just feel like you know when it comes to it- I mean I may be generalizing white people-But I feel like white people don't actually really dislike

Black people. I feel if you have money it doesn't matter if you're Black. Or if you have like influence or some type of talent, it doesn't matter if your Black. Like, white people love Kanye. You know? It's like, he's still Black but like they love him and stuff like that. So, it's like, sometimes like it's like, Okay, you may be doing this 'cause I'm Black or less wealthy or whatever, but if I have money, you literally would be kissing my feet right now." And I guess I plan to have money one day, like in my head. So, it's just like, okay, yeah that [microaggression] happened, but it's okay, because later on, you're not going to have a choice but to accept me. - Ono

Ono is unbothered by the few microaggressions he has experienced specifically because he does not read them as essentially, truly racist or racial in nature. Instead, Ono attributes the few moments of mistreatments he's endured to white people's general (mis)perception that Black people (like himself) lack significant socioeconomic and influential capacity. Furthermore, Ono believes that greater wealth and more prestigious social positions are intrinsically obtainable by exceptional persons regardless of their racial identity. Given this assumption, Ono has concluded that his inevitable financial success will grant him universal respect in the same way that Kanye's[5] influential and lucrative art broke racial barriers and offered him white admiration. Other students in the SFG also believed their hard work and success would render present or future racism meaningless.

I feel like majority of the time I'm like more intelligent than they are anyways, and I also feel bad for people that are like that ignorant and let prejudice like really affect them- Eric

My entire life, at least when I was really young, I had low self-esteem until I realized that I was actually capable of certain things, especially academically. And ever since then, you know, I feel like I've always been looked down upon for whatever reason, not just because of my race but just like, in general. In those instances where I could be looked down upon, it sort of in a way motivates me because like- I feel like when you get to some point of greatness, people are going to love you regardless of the color of your skin. And I feel like we've seen that many times in history you know and I know that's like an optimistic thing to say but I feel like, I'm not doing it for people's approval or people's love. But it's like what Ono said, if you are uncomfortable with me because I'm Black or

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[5] This focus group interview was conducted prior to Kanye West's recent fiascos and fall from favor in liberal circles.

whatever, like you know I'm going to do something so great that you will have no choice but to recognize how great that is, regardless of what you say.- Taron

Black Like You: SFG Coping Beyond the Locus of Control

I wanted quite simply to be a man among men. I would have liked to enter our world young and sleek, a world we could build together…Whereas I was prepared to forget, to forgive, and to love, my message was flung back at me…the white world, the only decent one, was preventing me from participating…It demanded of me that I behave like a black man-or at least like a Negro. – Frantz Fanon, 1952, p.92-94

Do not stare at me because I am black. The sun has darkened my skin. My brothers were angry at me; They made me a caretaker of their vineyard. But I have not taken care of my own vineyard. - Song of Solomon 1:6.

The SFG participants rarely felt stretched beyond their capacity to negotiate or outwork a racial scenario. However, when reflecting on incidents that caused more than passing discomfort the students suggested the "crisis" did not emanate from the racial microaggression itself.

> There was one moment I can recall here on campus. I was in the Business School and we were going to meet someone, like an administrator for some project that we were doing. And the student leader in our committee was saying, "Oh yes, we're going to meet with this person. Da da da da." And he was like "(Addressing me) Yo man, you should definitely speak up to [the administrator] when he comes in… Da da da da…Y'all will hit it off. He's Black." At first, I didn't understand what he was saying. Was he saying that because like the dude was Black, I could get in front of him and possibly get an actual network out of him. But it was just awkward 'cause he said it in front of White people. The guy who said it was Indian and he said it in front of White people. So, it's like, the White people were looking at me, expecting me to blow up. So, I was like, even though I wasn't offended of what he said, they're looking at me like I might have a problem with it. I felt ok though. But I was thinking, like, should I be offended? Should I go off or should I not? What should I do? So, it was just a very awkward situation to be in 'cause it's like I had to decide between not caring 'cause I didn't care, or like fitting into the state of mind like you know "clap back" because that's what they expected me to do.

Ono was confused and unsure of how to respond or cope with this particular microaggression. However, as previously mentioned, his uncertainty did stem from the actual racialized incident. Instead, Ono attributed his undo stress to the social discomfort caused by his Indian peer who

centered collective attention on race in a manner that was difficult to ignore or shift attention away from. He was only frustrated that he had been forced to engage in internal questioning in response to the racial *hyper*sensitivities of the other nonBlack people involved in the situation. This was particularly egregious because Ono prides himself on being able to maneuver through these kinds of "awkward" situations with relative ease. He was thus left with unnatural and non-agential response options.

When asked about how they contend with racist events that may be beyond their control, other students in the SFG reported remaining optimistic about both their personal future success and the likelihood of overall racial progress. In this way, the students saw racism as generally and generationally permeable.

> I feel like what we've seen many times in history, and I know that's like an optimistic thing to say but, I feel like, but it's like what Ono said, if you are uncomfortable with me because I'm Black or whatever, like you know I'm going to do something so great that you will have no choice but to recognize how great that is, regardless of what you say.- Taron

> One of the way that I usually try to cope is I try to not think about the incident at hand, but think of like the future like down the line because if you look at like historically, given you know some, there's some death, there are some local efforts generally trending upwards and I usually like try to think of that and think you know, well that's one racist white guy. But his kids won't be as racist, hopefully. You know and I think, you know, black people vote more nowadays than they used to so that's a plus and then hopefully less bad things with black people will happen you know. I think I'm trying to think positive.- Eric

There seems to be a coherent, emergent coping process of participants in the SFG given their collective responses to everyday racism. According to the data from Chapter 5 and the present chapter, the SFG students they rarely appraised (denied) ambiguous racial incidents as racial microaggressions. However, when initially encountering a known racialized event, the students in the SFG:

1. Deny (then) Ignore the racial incident

2. Make jokes and blow it off in order to allow the discomfort to pass
3. Attributed everyday discrimination to socioeconomic prejudice

When these strategies are not able to interrupt the deployment of microaggressions, the

students said that they:

4. Felt confused and ambivalent
5. Planned to overcome racism through hard work and financial success
6. Remained optimistic about the prospects of racial progress.

Similar to their peers, this process was echoed by students throughout the SFG and serves a

Critical Race Grounded (Perez-Huber, Malagon, Velez, 2011) framework for the coping

strategies of Black collegiate men with relatively shorter telomeres.

Between a Rock and Racial Permeability: Summary of Participant Coping Strategies

I feel in myself a soul as immense as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers; my chest has the power to expand to infinity. I am powerful, free, and autonomous and yet I am advised to adopt the humility of an incapacitated being. When I opened my eyes yesterday I saw the sky in total revulsion. I tried to get up but the eviscerated silence surged towards me with paralyzed wings. Not responsible for my acts, at the crossroads between Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep. -Frantz Fanon, 1952, p.119

Summary of LFG Coping

The students in the LFG offered instructive data regarding their racial coping strategies.

The young men are engaged in a microaggression management process that is grounded in their

racial socialization experiences. This initial process included anticipation and expectation of

racism, perceptive recognition of daily attacks, and passive-to-active interventions intended to

lessen the harmful impact of the antiblackness. However, further examination of the students'

extended discussion revealed only one instance of a direct challenge to a microaggression:

Bishop's eventual questioning of the perpetual pocket checkers. The rest of the students, Bishop

included, described numerous racist encounters (and contexts) that exceeded their capacities to

intervene directly against. Although their rationales vary, a common concern among the young

169

men seems to be more intense consequences, violence, and repercussions that would most assuredly accompany their interventions. Moreover, in addition to this retaliatory backlash, the young men identified the far-reaching and seemingly permanent antiblack violence that temporally (related to time) and structurally reinforces any given contemporary microaggression. Succinctly, the LFG participants were conscious that the transgenerational shrapnel embedded in modern-day, mundane racial violence impacted their well-being regardless of their actions or inactions.

> I worry that I'm being impacted. I've just not been paying attention at all to my health. Just with everything that's on my plate here and the just the stupid racial shit. Lately, I don't feel energetic to get through the day. I'm kind of I'm feeling older after one year like, turning from 18 to 19, you know? I feel like that's not good and it's honestly starting to scare me a little bit because my Dad's side of the family definitely has a history of diabetes, heart problems, my grandma died relatively young. My dad is getting into his 60's now and he already has diabetes. He's starting to have problems with his thyroid. And I really want to avoid all of that and that's why I'm glad that you're offering this [study on telomeres and Black men] because I think like the health of Black people and Black men is the easiest one to kind of relate to in this instance is something that goes unchecked and not talked about frequently enough to be able to try to make some preventative measure at such an early point of stage and that's something I really want to do because I'm not trying to go through the same stuff that he did because it's not easy. – Ryan

The LFG students understood UCLA as well as the larger United States as racially permanent entities. The students acknowledged that their attempts to cope strategically with that existential and ongoing crisis of everyday life were effective only in limited capacities. Knowing the scope, scale, and force of the antiblackness that animated microaggressions, the students expected (and experienced) their coping mechanisms would falter in the face of that larger, structural reality. For these students, regardless of their coping strategies, the structure of racism itself represents the clear and present impediment to well-being. In the face of this ceaseless (ageless) racism, the students avoided nonBlack spaces, developed and maintained a baseline

pessimism regarding racial progress, connected and debriefed with other Black students and family members, engaged in spirituality and restorative rituals.

SFG Summary

Aligned with previous findings, the young men in the SFG did not perceive microaggressions as symptomatic reminders of a much larger, all-encompassing, structure of antiblackness. Instead the participants reported that they were largely unbothered by racism given their past habituation, navigational capacities, and eventual successes. These students felt comfortable using jokes and other evasive maneuvers to change the subject if and when racial issues came up. They also found it relatively easy to minimize and ignore racial microaggressions. In the few instances the young men felt more than passing pressure from racialized stress, they managed the stress by relying on their core confidence in their ability to overcome racism through hard work and financial success. They also remained optimistic about the prospects for a racially progressive future.

Both the LFG and SFG discussion on racial coping mechanisms seem to align with their distinct racial socialization and appraisal tendencies. Additionally, their racially permanent and permeable coping processes are helpful in expanding Solórzano's and Perez-Huber's Model for Understanding and Analyzing Racial Microaggressions as well as the developing Microaggression Process Model as well as. I add the focus-group derived racial coping strategies to the models below and conclude the final findings chapter in this TSMM study.

Processing Microaggressions

As established in the previous chapter, the Microaggression Process Models demonstrate how the focus group participants, distinguished by telomere length, expressed racial microaggression appraisals *stemming* from their racial socialization experiences which are

(always already) rooted in the fact of antiblackness. Recall also that this TSMM study examines

relative telomere length as one biomarker of long-term health effects potentially impacted by

processing of chronic race-related stress. I do not measure psychological or physiological effects

of racial microaggressions. Thus, at the onset of current chapter, we knew less about the role of

coping strategies in the participants processing of everyday racism. In response, figures 6.1 and

6.2 represent are informed by the previously discussed coping mechanisms of the focus group

participants.

Figure 6.1

A Microaggression Process Model (Longer Telomeres)
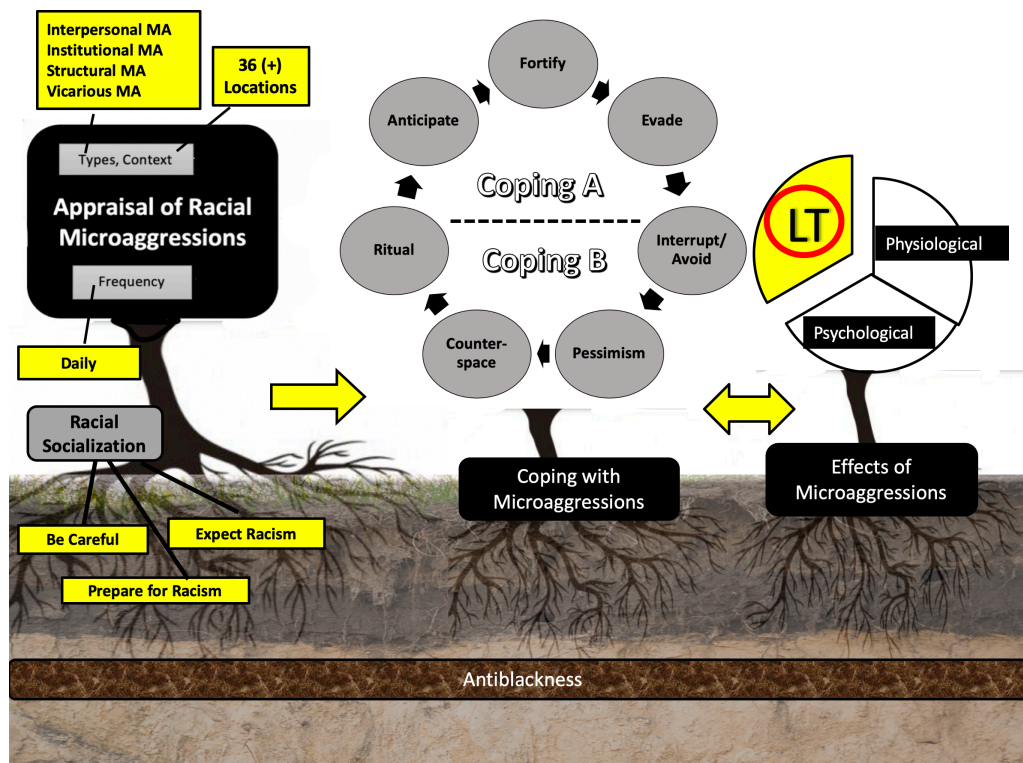
Figure 6.2

A Microaggression Process Model (Shorter Telomeres)
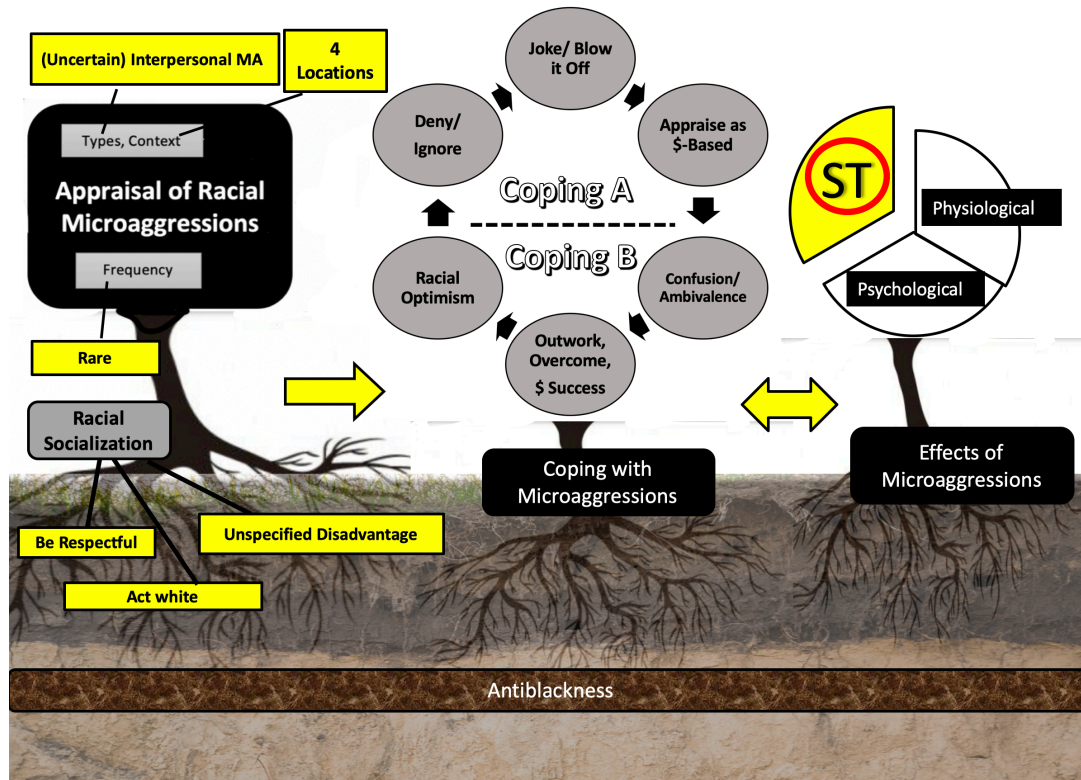
Embedded in the **coping** domains for both process models, there is a dotted line demarcating

Coping A responses and Coping B responses.[6] The Coping A designations represent the

participants initial attempts at coping with everyday racism as described in this chapter. The

Coping B designations represent the participants subsequent coping strategies after their initial

attempts are overwhelmed or reach a threshold. These updated process models also reflect how

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[6]Coping A responses for the LFG are: Anticipate, Fortify, Evade, and Interrupt
Coping B responses for the LFG are: Avoid, Pessimism, Counterspace, Ritual
Coping A responses for the SFG are: Deny/Ignore, Joke/Blow it Off, Appraise discrimination as based on socioeconomic status, Confusion about racism
Coping B responses for the SFG are: Ambivalence about racism, Outwork and Overcome racism through financial success, and Optimism about the potential for racial justice.

173

Black men's coping with racism as well as the telomeric impact of racial microaggressions are also rooted in their racial socialization and the foundation of antiblackness. Additionally, although this study did not test for causal relationships between variables, it seems more appropriate to situate the focus group participants' racial management strategies (i.e. coping mechanisms) *before* the effects of racial microaggressions, give that accelerated telomere degeneration is indicative of prolonged (as opposed to acute) chronic stress; the unidirectional arrow emanating from the **appraisal** domain is meant to convey this possible dynamic. Furthermore, the bidirectional arrow between **coping** and **effects** suggests these domains may influence each other.

The two-tiered telomere focus group data as portrayed in these Microaggression Process models also supports an additional expansion of Solórzano and Perez-Huber's (2015) Model for Understanding Racial Microaggressions. Included below are the increasingly expanding iterations of the original model. The actual updated model, figure 6.3, is detailed on page 28.

Figure 5.1 Revisited

Figure 5.4 Revisited
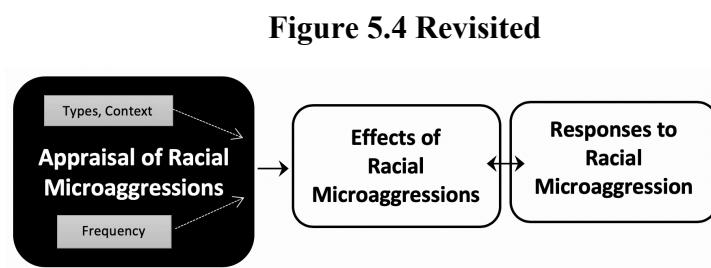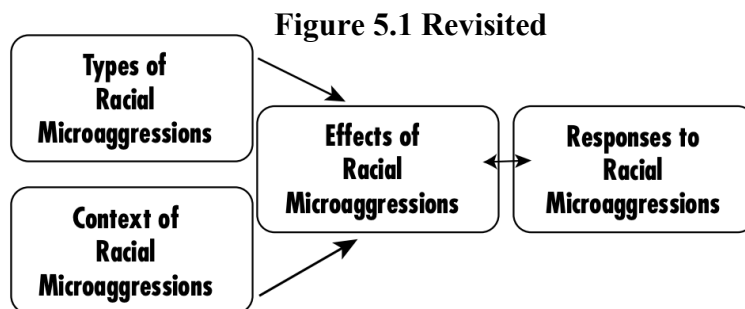
Figure 5.8 Revisited
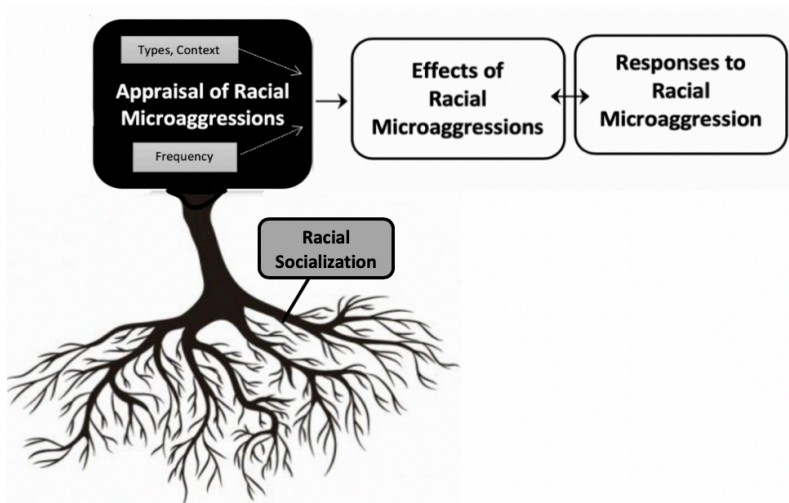
Figure 5.9 Revisited
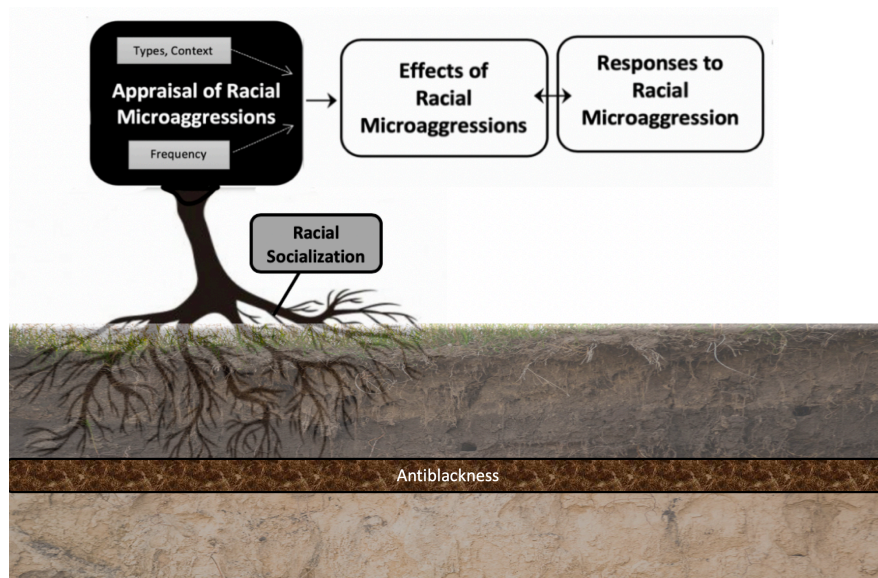
Figure 6.3

An Updated Model for Understanding and Analyzing Racial Microaggressions
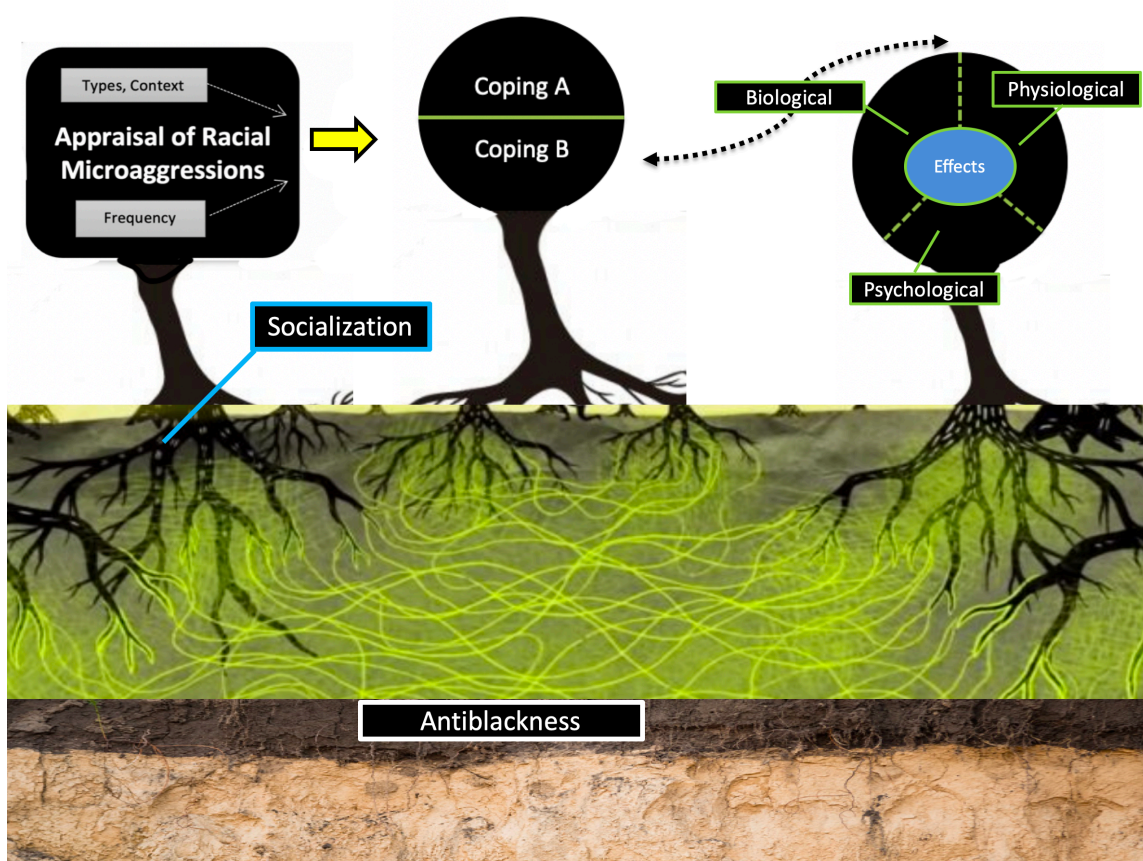
Recall that Solórzano and Perez Huber, 2012 posit that it may be possible to draw from the

wisdom of Dr. Pierce to distinguish healthy avenues and arsenals of responses (coping strategies)

to racial microaggressions. They offered a model based on previous research that considered the

types, contexts, psychophysiological effects, and varied coping (responses) of targeted

individuals. The updated model offered through the TSMM analysis of the available data enabled

us to add frequency (or how often a microaggression occurs) to the collective appraisal of types

and context. These appraisals are rooted in racial preparation messages from a variety of sources.

Moreover, that racial socialization is perpetually catalyzed within racialized society and

grounded in an antiblack foundation. Furthermore, the coping strategies and effects of racial microaggressions are informed by the same socialization and appraisal tendencies of targeted individuals. Theses domains are also rooted in the same antiblack foundation and may influence one another. This version of the model is distinguished by the interconnected and communicative "root system" of the Socialization, Appraisal, Coping, and Effects domains.

This chapter concerned **Question 2a**: **What might we learn from the Black males' coping strategies in light of their varied telomere lengths (effects)?**

The two-tiered telomere focus group data suggest that Black men with longer telomeres engage in racial management strategies that are informed by their internalization of protective racial socialization messages and critical appraisals of frequent and expansive forms of everyday racism. In anticipation of racism, the LFG participants reported preparing their psychological defenses for an inevitable onslaught of assaults. On campus, the young men attempted to evade harm by mentally noting and cataloguing each microaggression they endured, minimizing the power of racism, ridiculing the absurdity of antiblack violence, and intentionally avoiding encounters with nonBlack people and places. Despite these efforts, the students' evasive coping (A) processes were routinely overwhelmed by the frequency, banality institutional endorsement, innate threat of intensified retaliation, and existential, temporal force of microaggressions. The LFG students' secondary/reserve coping (B) processes included rare occasions of directly challenging aggressors, steady withdrawals from nonBlack space, remaining pessimistic about racial progress, seeking out supportive counterspaces, commiserating about racism with Black peers and family, and engaging spirituality and rituals of respite, creation, and restoration in anticipation of another, daily racial battle

Conversely, unlike their LFG peers, these students did not report engaging in pre-meditated racial navigation. However, similar to their LFG peers, the SFG students seemed to employ coping strategies that aligned with their socialization and appraisal tendencies. For example, these students remained hesitant to consider negative events as definitively racist. They opted to ignore as many of the ambiguous circumstances as possible. Additionally, several of the young men attempted to use a jovial and civil demeanor along with humor to alter the nature of racially assaultive conversations. Once again echoing the appraisal findings, a few students explained that they employed these sorts of tactics specifically because the microaggression occurred without the awareness of the perpetrator. Thus, it wouldn't' be fair or helpful to become angry, despondent, or offended by what the other unknowing person said or did. When denying, ignoring, or diverting the microaggression was proven less effective, the participants in the SFG utilized vigilant responses in an effort to shift the stress back into their own locus of control.

For instance, several students argued that the true impetus behind ambiguous or overt racial prejudice was not antiblackness (a phenomenon that renders the students vulnerable to pain by virtue of their phenotype…an aspect of the self beyond their control). Instead, the students maintained that the engine of racism was actually bias against poor and working-class individuals who are overrepresented as Black. With this framing in mind, the SFG participants felt confident that their hard-work and inevitable financial success would enable them to obtain general (white) admiration and avoid the sting of racism in the future. Additionally, although the occasional embarrassing racial event occurred at their expense, most of the participants said specifically that they remained optimistic in the prospects of racial progress and their overall likelihood of escaping the unnecessary inconveniences of gallows of antiblackness.

Scholars in Education (Solórzano et al., 2000) have noted that Black students report positive psychological outcomes when their responses (coping) to racial microaggressions include engagement with counterspaces, drawing strength from similarly situated community members, gaining critical race consciousness to help them recognize and analyze everyday racism, and participating in transformational resistance in the face of ongoing racial harm (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). It appears the participants in the Longer Telomere Focus Group are using several proactive techniques to cope with everyday racism. Accessing counterspaces, relying on protective racial socialization, articulating a critical race consciousness, and seeking out spiritual comfort have all been linked to healthy outcomes for individuals exposed to race related stress (Constantine, 2002).

Using telomere length as a possible proxy for long-term health, it seems as though the participants with shorter telomeres are engaged in coping responses that most researchers agree are not advantageous when experiencing chronic racial stress. For example, denying and ignoring potentially harmful situations (avoidant coping) often disqualify individuals from being able to craft out practical intervention and management plans necessary to alleviate the underlying stress (Harrell, 2000). Additionally, self-policing and respectability postures have been linked to hypervigilance as well as a bevy of related physiological health concerns such as hypertension (Lee and Hicken, 2016).

These findings offer a suitable response to Question 2a and seemingly affix the participants in dichotomous cadres of more and less healthy responders (relatively speaking). However, research across Psychology and Public Health have offered sometimes contradictory notions regarding what constitutes healthy responses to everyday racism. The collective findings

in this and the previous chapters are promising *and* further complicate our understanding of the biopsychosocial impact of everyday racism. I will offer several implications and directions for future study in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7

Uprooting Cellular Violence: Implications and Conclusion

"Look how handsome that Negro is." "The handsome Negro says, 'Fuck you,' madame." Her face colored with shame. At last I was freed from my rumination. I realized two things at once: I had identified the enemy and created a scandal. Overjoyed. We could now have some fun. –Frantz Fanon, 1952, p.94

This dissertation examines dynamics relating to the biopsychosocial impact of everyday racism amongst Black males at the University of California, Los Angeles. Current research suggests college-educated Black men accumulate stress through frequent encounters with ambiguous forms of racial discrimination. Previous investigations have noted that these racial microaggressions can wreak havoc on the psychological and physiological functioning of Black males and may be complicit in their elevated levels of stress-related disease and shortened lifespans. This Critical Race study, infused with epistemologies from Education, Psychology, Biology, and Public Health offers additional understandings into how Black men at a large PWI on the west coast experience, appraise, and contend with quotidian antiblackness. The study is intentionally aligned with a broader endeavor to equip Black communities with sharper tools to navigate antiblackness.

In pursuit of this goal, I utilized a transformative sequential mixed method (TSMM) to collect biostatiscal (saliva sample), quantitative (microaggression survey), and qualitative (focus group) data to more reliably investigate the relationship between Black collegiate males' recognized experiences on the PWI *and* their relative telomere length, a biometric of stress-related (vs. chronological) aging. As previously mentioned, recent research has established a relationship between human exposures to stressful situations and an *unnatural, accelerated* aging marked by rapid telomere shortening. However, there was, prior to this study, a dearth of scholarship that cohesively interrogated the Black college males' recognition and coping with

everyday racism alongside the potential repercussions for telomeric disruption. In this chapter I offer several limitations of the study. I then provide a reflection and discussion on the implications for an emerging theory of racial microaggressions. After the discussion, I provide implications for research, policy, and educational practitioners. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion of the broader potential research potential for healing.

Limitations of Dissertation Findings

The limitations of this study include the following. First, this TSMM study solely focused on self-identified, Black cisgender men and excluded Black transwomen, transmen, gender non-conforming persons, and ciswomen. Non-Black People of Color were also excluded from the study. Secondly, the study participants were undergraduate students who were currently enrolled at UCLA, a PWI. As previously mentioned, although the Phase I participants represent $1/5^{th}$ of the Black male population at UCLA, the telomere and survey findings are derived from and limited to this group of students; this is equally true of the focus group findings.

It should also be noted that although the survey included items regarding major life stress, it did not ask students about their potential experiences with prenatal adversity, significant childhood trauma, or mental illness. Exposure to any one of these social epidemiological toxins may be implicative of shorter relative telomere length. Likewise, themes regarding adverse experiences (beyond racism) did not emerge in the focus group data. This could be due to the structure of group interviews and lack of confidentiality. Either way, the lack of information regarding additional and confounding experiences that may impact telomere length also limits the gains of the study.

There also weren't any apparent telomere length differences associated with participant sexuality, socioeconomic status, ability, documentation status, or color/phenotype. These

intersecting identities are typically influential in compounded racialized stress (Harrell, 2000).

However, the absence of an observation of an expected dynamic does not indicate or affirm a null impact. Instead, numerous factors, including my own developing inclusion and intersectionality focused research acumen, could be the cause of not creating a safe or welcoming environment in either the survey instrument or the focus group interview space for participants to share their experiences.

Finally, it should be noted that research utilizing telomeres to track social embodiment is still in its nascent phase. Moreover, our understandings of the relationship of telomere lengths in the broader racial stress processes are also growing. For example, there was no known national database of average or expected telomere length disaggregated by various racial populations throughout the majority of data collection and analysis for this dissertation study. Dr. Marquez-Magana recently informed me that this terrain is shifting as I conclude this dissertation.[1] Relatedly, my study is similar to the majority of telomere research in that it features a cross-sectional design in an effort to make in-group distinctions within a particular age/positional cohort (i.e. Black male UCLA undergraduates, ages 18-26) regarding variables of interest (i.e. recognition of racial microaggressions). However, a recent ground-breaking study by another affiliate of the HER Lab, Dr. Tiffani Marie[2] (2019) of University of California Berkeley, features a longitudinal design to observe telomere and other biomarker change *over time* in relation to a multi-year intervention with a group of trauma-impacted Youth of Color. Longitudinal telomere studies are preferable specifically because of their potential explanatory power in regards to controlling for confounding variables and more reliably observing the impact of various social determinants of health (such as racism or another form of trauma). Thus, Dr. Marie's work offers

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[1] See Blackburn and Epel's (2017) *The Telomere Effect* for a possible national telomere average length

[2] I refer to Dr. Marie's powerful study later in this chapter

186

extremely valuable insight and addresses several limitations within my own study. Despite these considerations, the present dissertation contributes potentially compelling information as well.

As previously mentioned, the present study is serving as an initial pilot for future investigations into the impact of everyday racism on the health of Black men and other People of Color. The Phase I participants collectively constitute approximately 1/5th (19.5%) of the overall Black male undergraduate student population at UCLA. Additionally, the participants in the study are the third largest cohort of Black men to offer primary biodata with telomere length as the variable of interest. It is also the only telomere study to date with primary data collection and analysis featuring Black collegiate men. The study is also unique in its inclusion of individual and focus group qualitative data, providing an important intervention in telomere research on racial discrimination that centers marginalized, Black voices. Once again, while I do not attempt to make population-based claims, in light of the broader dearth of telomere research, this TSMM study may indeed be a novel entry into the annuls of research in higher education, Black men, and biomarkers of accelerated aging. In the sections below, I offer a reflection on the implications of the study across theory, research, policy and practice.

Climate Grief: Reflecting on Study Implications

Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.- Herodotus

I've been familiar with this unofficial creed of the US Postal Service since I was six years old given my father's long-standing career as a letter carrier. A combination of child-centered programming as well as my unstinted imagination inspired visions of my dad, bundled in insulated clothing with thick galoshes on, marching defiantly through sweeping cascades of snow and hail in order to deliver the necessary packages to those in need. In my young mind, my

187

dad, like Santa Clause, confronted weather as the primary antagonist. These visions were in

fact wild dreams. I grew up 60 miles east of Los Angeles, in the desert-like climate of the

Inland Empire, specifically, Moreno Valley, CA. It rained sparingly (more than it does now), and

I had only seen the snow in person two times in my life prior to graduating from college.

Instead of a down jacket and waterproof boots, my dad sported shorts, walking shoes, and

a visor to protect himself from the sun. I didn't pay much attention to the part of the creed that

named "heat" as a foil for letter carriers, preferring my own daydreams of what "real weather"

was while growing up. As odd as it may seem to folks who grew up outside of what some people

call "Southern California," the monotony of our everyday temperate existence felt like a

ceaseless loop of sun and heat, wherein it was difficult to know when summer ended and winter

began.

Weather seems, at first glance, to be an appropriate metaphor for the realities of Black

life in the present study of the biopsychosocial impact of quotidian antiblackness. The young

Black men who participated in the study are all accomplished UCLA students, under the age of

27, with healthy profiles and promising futures. However, our examination suggests that the

majority of men in the sample are experiencing everyday discrimination and early biologic

dysregulation. Their telomeres are deteriorating at an accelerated rate (in relation to their

chronological age) and they are seemingly aging rapidly (or, said another way, they are dying

pre-maturely). Furthermore, this study suggests that the individuals who can recognize the

mundane racism that haunts their movements in the classroom, in their dorms, in the silent

violence of elevator rides, and in late night ventures to social spaces, and identify them <u>as</u>

<u>antiblackness</u>. are "healthier" (via TL) compared to those students who mistake their endurance

of ambiguous moments of meanness, invisibility, hypervisibility, criminality, etc. as something other than antiblackness.

Thus, the study extends our understanding of what Public Health Scholars (Geronimus, 2004) refer to as "weathering;" providing insight into future research and implications for policy and practices related to the cumulative toll of erosion from racism on the health of Black people. Collectively, the telomere, quantitative, and qualitative findings detailed across Phase I and II of the dissertation support the notion that accurately recognizing and preparing for everyday racism is more-than-likely positive for long-term health outcomes. Thus, at first glance, an apparent "practice" recommendation stemming from this study (taking the previously stated limitations into account) is to help improve Black collegiate men's awareness of and responses to everyday racism. Although I would endorse such a data-informed implication, the lingering concerns that emerged throughout the study findings require more attention.

Recall that, given the empirical work on telomeres, age, and disease, one would expect to see certain telomere lengths at certain ages and associated with certain health profiles. In general, older people have shorter telomeres than younger people and individuals with serious diseases have shorter telomeres than healthier individuals. However, what was surprising and remains disconcerting is that approximately 30% of the young men in the study have relative telomere lengths that are at or below 1 T/S; close to the average TL (.93 TS) for women in the breast cancer study. Moreover, the relative telomere length of 16% (7 men) of the participants in the Black male study is shorter than the average length of breast cancer survivors with "short" telomeres. Some of the young men have a TL shorter than women who had survived the most severe forms of cancer. One individual in the present study, a 19-year-old in his first year at UCLA, has a T/S of .16, shorter than all 56 breast cancer survivors. Some of the young men have

189

a TL shorter than women twice their age who had severe cancer. Additionally, although the relative TL of the majority of young men are longer than the women from the comparison study, the two groups are far closer than anticipated given the extant literature connecting telomere length to aging (Epel et al., 2009). Furthermore, regardless of the socialization, appraisals, and coping mechanisms internalized and employed by the participants in the two-tiered focus groups, all of the purportedly healthy men in the study sample have telomere lengths that are hovering around the TL of women twice their age (over 40) who have breast cancer, a life-threatening disease.

These young men are reportedly healthy. The young men have successfully matriculated into the number one public university in the US and number 13 university in the world. All of these students are undoubtedly successful. They are presumably on their way to successful careers. Additionally, a negligible percentage of the young men reported experiencing any sort of major life stress prior to taking part in the study. Moreover, according to the survey and focus group data, more than a few of the young men have adopted particular recognition and response strategies that previous research has suggested inhibits deleterious outcomes of racism.

What Are We to Do About This?

Writer, Ernest Hardy (2017), has noted that when Black scholars surface dismaying information related to Black people, which challenges the idiom that the proverbial arc is bending towards justice, they are typically required to assuage the concerns of those who may feel implicated within (or most especially those who may feel implicated BY) the tragedy that's been unearthed. It is as if the visceral response/query, "What Are We to Do About This?" precedes the very naming of the problem. Critical educator, Paulo Freire (1970) might take issue with this attempt however…particularly as it is formulated in the vein of trying to solve the

problem. Instead (and/also), Freire argues that the path towards the underlying inspiration of

 such a question (actual liberation from the unearthed harm) is achieved through a process of

problem-posing, which includes listening, dialogue, and action (Smith-Maddox and Solórzano,

2002). Utilizing this method, we have *heard* the Black men's voices, bodies, and cells tell a

counterstory about everyday racism they endure, how they respond, and how they might be

differentially impacted (Yosso and Solórzano, 2005). The implications for the study are

necessarily grounded in respectful dialogue with those narratives. In the same problem-posing

vein, I suggest that before engaging *what we should do* (in research, policy, and practice) about

the data at hand, it is important to reconsider the lens through which we are *reading the world*

(Freire, 1970) of racial microaggressions. In discussing the study, implications of

microaggressions and Critical Race Theory, I hope to examine what exactly is the scale and

scope of the problem.

Implications for Theory

Taboa[3] Sankofa: Re-Member-ing Microaggressions

Double-Click
Picture to Play

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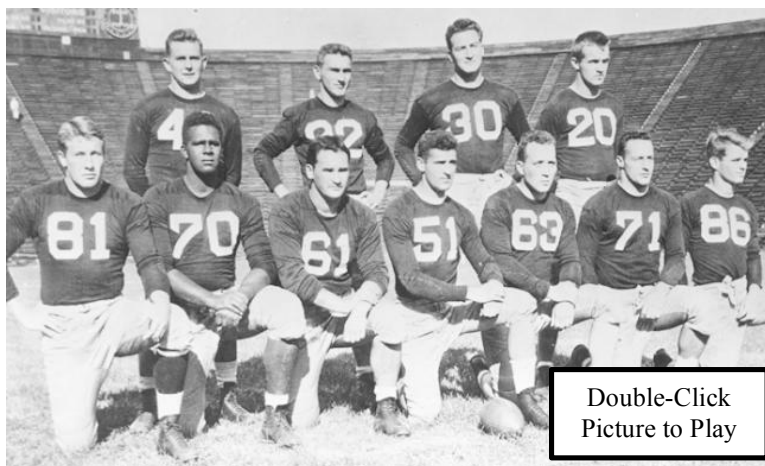
[3] Professor Chet Toboa ("toboa" means "pierce" -as in a spear- in Swahili) is a composite character based on Dr. Chester Pierce in Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2006) in their article *Challenging Racial Battle Fatigue on Historically White Institutions: A critical race examination of race-related stress.* In their story, Professor Toboa, a Harvard professor of psychiatry and education, goes missing in 1972, leaving only a trail of breadcrumbs in the form of his publications on racial microaggressions. Sankofa is a word and ideal derived from the Akan people of West Africa. In English it literally means, "It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot."

These [racial] assaults to black dignity and black hope are incessant and cumulative. Any single one may be gross. In fact, the major vehicle for racism in this country is offenses done to blacks by whites in this sort of gratuitous never-ending way. These offenses are microaggressions. Almost all black-white racial interactions are characterized by white put-downs, done in automatic, pre-conscious, or unconscious fashion. These minidisasters accumulate. It is the sum total of multiple microaggressions by whites to blacks that has pervasive effect to the stability and peace of this world. -Chester Pierce, 1974, p. 51[4]

The implications of this study, in addition to years of focused reflections, conversations, observations, and political developments have expanded and strengthened my initial conviction that the Theory of Racial Microaggressions is in urgent need of an intervention by way of rigorous elaboration. And thanks to the wisdom I've been offered from perceptive scholars ranging in age from 4 to 95 years old in classrooms, juvenile facilities, courthouses, airports, conferences, film screenings, day cares, and family gatherings, I feel confident that the true target of such an elaboration extends far beyond the exercise of incremental knowledge acquisition within the confines of a hopelessly antiblack academy *or* yet another neoliberal reformation endeavoring tirelessly towards Black people's broader incorporation into an inherently antiblack civil society. Although a full theoretical development is beyond the scope of this chapter, the dissertation findings provide reasonable impetus to propose a direction for future theory development.

Working the Root: An Asili of Antiblackness

Asili means "seed" in Kiswahili. It also means "origin" or "the nature of a thing…." In its essence, asili becomes something like the DNA of a culture. It is a

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[4] This clip attached to the photo of a young Dr. Chester Pierce on his Harvard football team, features writers Ernest Hardy and Tisa Bryant (2017) in their multimedia meditation entitled *Trouble in Mind: But I Won't Be Blue Always* wherein they discuss, "Black people's reasonable responses to four centuries of unreasonable, barely livable conditions are routinely criminalized and used to stoke anti-blackness. The cumulative toll is paid in their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being." Hardy and Bryant sifted through film, television, music, social media, and news to explore Black representations of depression and distress, remedies and healing, and the resilience of joy in Black life and culture. In this particular segment, they show and analyze a clip from the 1967 documentary film *Portrait of Jason*. Jason Holiday, the subject of the film, is a Black gay man who is describing mundane events in his life.

germinating principle. It is a genetic information…Once that asili of a particular culture is in place, it will seek to fulfill itself. And everything that a people in a culture create will be towards the fulfillment of that asili. – Marimba Ani, 1994

According to Christina Sharpe (2016), "…antiblackness is the ground on which we stand." Living in the wake of slavery, Sharpe explains, means inheriting the mantle of the non-person, about whom any absurdity can be claimed. There is a dilemma of attempting to "memorialize the everyday" when suffering is so ceaseless it is nearly impossible to find space and time for a reflective, sacred breath and remembrance. According to thinkers like Sharpe, Hortense Spillers, and Frank Wilderson, antiblackness is a total climate. Quite literally, the weather.

Blackness was developed as a negation to humanity (Wynter, 2003) to satiate the libidinal economy, "the fantasies of murderous hatred and unlimited destruction, of sexual consumption and social availability that animate the realization of [the violence] of power (Sexton, 2002). These fantasies were eventually codified into US law. For instance, phrase, "The Right to Own Property" is one of the first articulations of the criteria for US citizenship. It is also antiblack. Freedom to own property, first required freedom from being property. Black people were considered prior, present, or future slaves by virtue of their epidermis. Thus, nonblack skin granted global human citizenship and the right to not be Black (i.e. antiblack).

While this speaks to the current configuration of antiblackness in the "west," the epidermis of Africans has been a marker of slavery within the Arab slave trade for some 700 years prior to Christopher Columbus commencing genocide in the Caribbean (Anderson, 1995). Thus, antiblackness was an ancient and reliable calibration point long before Rene Descartes uttered, "I think, therefore I am," ushering in a violent cosmology intended on building a world stabilized by an antagonism between humans and non-humans (Ani, 1994). Ongoing epigenetic

193

terror is a part of what Black people inherit from our 1,398 years long death march through the

entrails and residue of our captivity, dispersals, abuses, and dis-memberings. The relative

reward for everyone else is the subconscious warmth of knowing that one is not-Black. In other

words, nonblack People of Color and whites are granted passports of opportunity to jockey for

relative proximity towards full incorporation into civil society, a civil society "against the dark"

(Dumas and Ross, 2016). With these informed assertions in mind, it is therefore beyond

reasonable to expect tangible encounters with both active and residual components of the

country's toxic genetic makeup in any given systemic endeavor to corroborate and combat its

impact.

An Initial Critical Racial Permanence Model of Everyday Antiblackness

In another recent elaboration of microaggression theory, Solórzano (2014) related

everyday racism to the leaves of a poisonous and evil tree. The branches upon which these

microaggresive leaves sprout and fall are institutions of oppression. The trunk is racism and the

roots are white supremacy.

Figure 7.1-Rooting Microaggressions v1
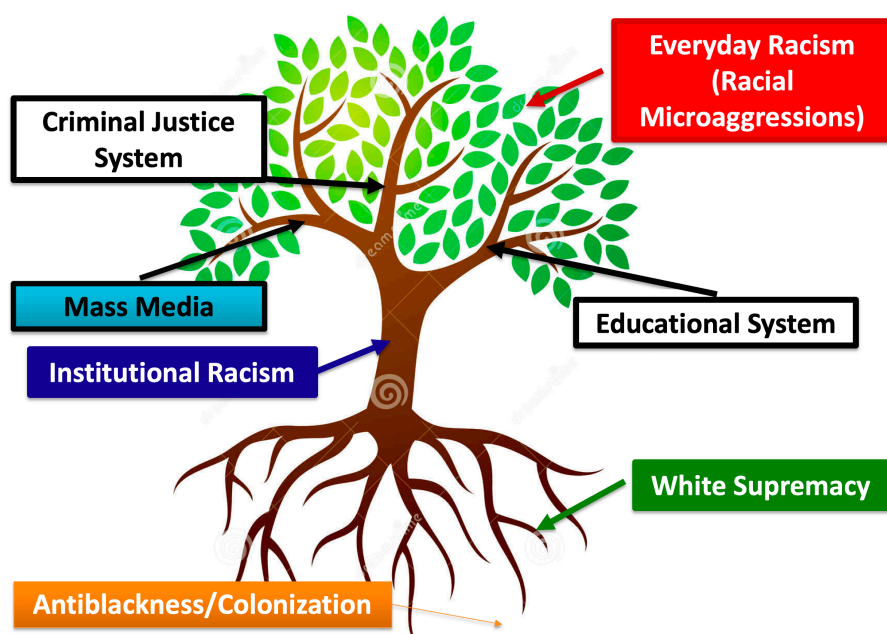
To Solórzano's model I would offer that the tree itself is representative of civil society (the world) grounded in an asili/seed (germinating matrix) of antiblackness. This asili enables the roots of the colonization to thrive. White supremacy is the water that continuously keeps the soil lively and the roots alive. The trunk of the tree represents institutional laws, policies and procedures that legitimize colonization and antiblackness. The branches of the tree represent organizing bodies that extend the institutions into more private spaces, and the leaves are the everyday reminders and reifiers of Black people's history of suffering.

Figure 7.2-Rooting Microaggressions v2
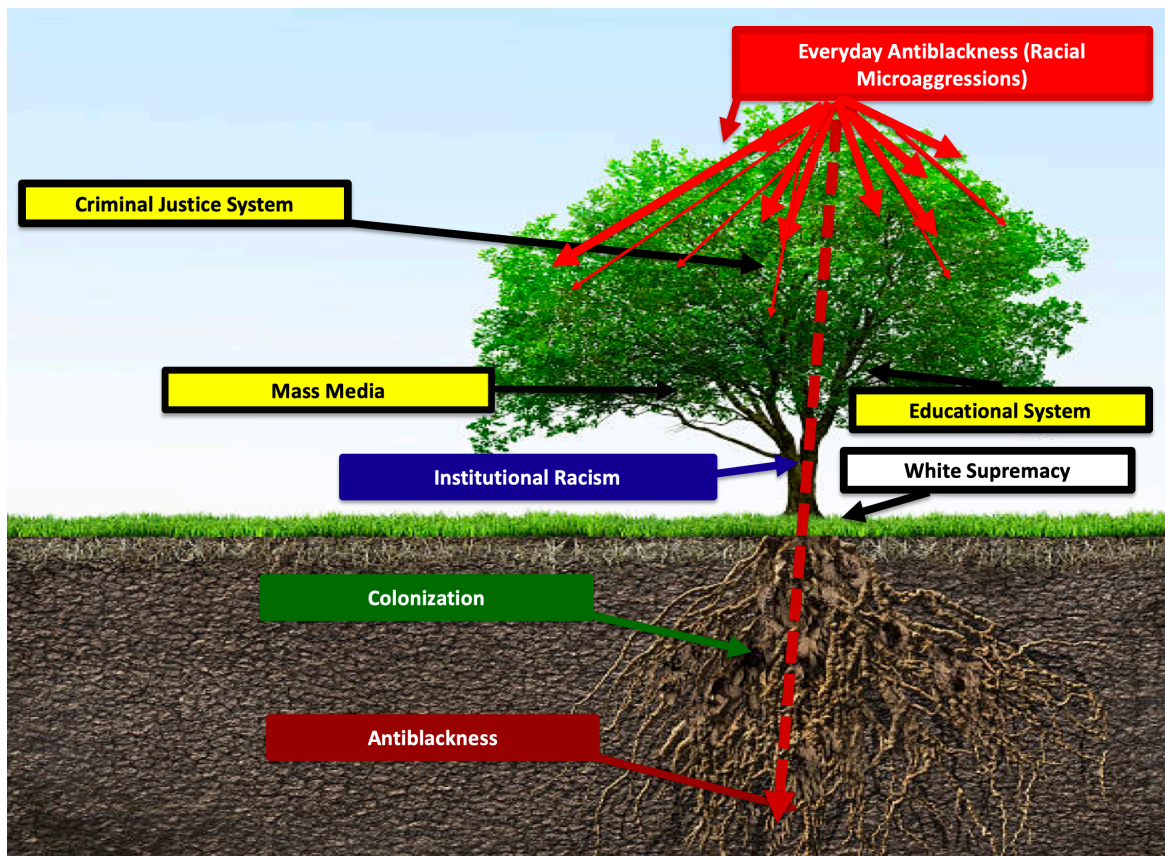
The larger system of racism is supported through racialized structures (historical events), institutions (laws, policies, and agencies), and interpersonal interactions. Racial microaggressions operate at the interpersonal level and function through the everyday interactions between individuals. They stem from a history of oppression that still influences our lives. Microaggressions are thus one of the most intimate manifestations of the largely illegible violence that animated the antiblack condition for the last 700 years. These terrors, tortures, and disasters are rooted in an antiblack seed that echoes, reifies, and resets the suffering of our people for the purposes of civil and psychological stability. They are relentless déjà vu's that strike and recoil much like a cornered viper; and, upon drawing blood, operate as parasitic receptacles that continuously photosynthesize and transform our Ifa (time, space, and spirit) into mundane fuel for its foul branches, trunk, and roots.

Implications for Research

The dissertation findings offer important implications for future research endeavors on mundane racism. For example, although Phase I and II data suggest potential health benefits of recognizing racism more readily, we have not yet found an immunity for the ravages of antiblackness for Black men. In the theory emerging from this study, microaggressions are framed as everyday violent encounters sprouting forth from and reinforcing a deeply rooted genome of antiblackness. Future scholarly investigations into the ways Black men anticipate, appraise, and respond to racism will benefit from utilizing this lens. It might be most prudent to commence such efforts by employing influential lines of thought that inform (a) the leaves of microaggressions (i.e. Chester Pierce's work on everyday racial terrors, tortures, and disasters as well as the ongoing work of his adherents in Education: Daniel Solórzano, Walter Allen, Grace Carrol, William Smith, Lindsay Perez-Huber, Mary Senyonga, amongst others) (b) the extending

branches and basis of institutionalized racist systems, policies, and procedures (i.e. Derrick

Bell's work on Racial Realism and the related strains of Racial Permanence in Critical Race

Theory and (c) the grounding wire, root system, and corrupted soil that are parasitic on Black

suffering (unflinchingly indicted by the likes of Frantz Fanon, Hortense Spillers, Sadiyah

Hartman, Frank Wilderson, Jared Sexton, and Christina Sharpe). This exhaustive framework

might allow for more precise research pursuits.

In addition to employing a Critical Racial Permanence Theory of Antiblackness, future

scholarship will benefit from expanding the interdisciplinary insight gained from using

biomarkers. As previously mentioned, Dr. Tiffani Marie's groundbreaking study is one of the

first to investigate telomere damage (and repair) over time amongst a group of trauma-involved

Youth of Color. Such efforts provide exciting potential for equipping Black and other

marginalized communities with evidence-based practices for extending life. Moreover, as my

dissertation served as a pilot, the results offer compelling impetus to invite a more representative

sample of Black men enrolled in comprehensive, community, private, and for-profit colleges in

the region to participate in the first state-wide study on the biopsychosocial impact of higher

educational environments. Taking a page from Tiffani, this research will take a longitudinal

approach and include additional biomarkers, ideally cortisol and oxytocin, to more reliably

measure the impact of race-related stress and interventions on biological and physiological

systems.

The study findings also complicate previously observed negative health outcomes related

to hypervigilance induced by racial stress. More specifically, the telomere and coping findings

suggest there are potentially positive *long-term* health outcomes when Black men anticipate and

avoid racially stressful situations. Current researchers, particularly in Psychology, have argued

197

that remaining hyperaware of racism and intentionally evading contact with nonBlacks

amounts to maladaptive coping. The same conclusions are drawn when considering engaging

weed as a racial coping mechanism. The young men in the Long Telomere Group offered

narratives that seemed to suggest racially realistic coping (inclusive of anticipatory threat

appraisal and active avoidance of nonBlack space) was an important way they maintained their

sense of psychological, energetic, and bodily integrity in the face of everyday racism.

Additionally, several young men in the group engaged cannabis as a ritualistic process of release

en route to replenishing their internal resources for ensuing racial battles. Although these data

points may rupture previous empirical sensibilities, future research utilizing the aforementioned

theoretical framework may be able to account for the discrepancy.

For example, anticipation and avoidance seem very much aligned with the spirit of

Chester Pierce's (1969; 1995) suggestions for navigating hostile territory. Additionally, when

employing Racial Permanence, it is not difficult to see the antiblackness inherent in the

criminalization of cannabis[5], its categorization as a Class 1 narcotic, and consequent inclusion as

a maladaptive coping mechanism by-default. In both of these cases, the proposed elaborated

theoretical framework offers a potential critique and path forward in research. For instance, in

other circumstances of perpetual harm at the level of one's lived environment (such as domestic

or intimate partner violence), neither empirical research nor suggested therapeutic interventions

frame vigilant coping responses (anticipating and preparing for violence/avoiding contact and

leaving) as maladaptive (Cooke, 2019). Nor do these lines of scholarship and practice consider a

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[5] I use the term "cannabis" intentionally. I don't refer to "marijuana" because the term was forcibly applied to "reefer" and "weed" by US government officials in the mid 20th century in order to trigger subconscious associations between the plant and Mexican/as in hopes of activating racist nativism in whites and dissuading them from engaging the herb and intermingling with Blacks or Latinx people who did (Freddy and Davy, 2019).

survivor's reliance on an external substance (of actual detrimental substances[6] at that) to cope

with the constant threat of or actual violence, the primary crisis on which to intervene and

change. Instead, (and of course!) the most vexing and noxious element in a survivor's life is the

threat and perpetrator of violence (Foster, 2015). Future research will benefit from taking this

rational, and long overdue conceptual step in understanding the "extremity" of mundane Black

life (Pierce, 2014).

A final implication for future research involves the extent to which scholarship continues

to rely on phenomenological approaches to investigating racism. These "nature of being and

consciousness" studies are ubiquitous throughout the literature on racism and gave rise to the oft-

used designation "perceived racism" (Harrell, 2000). As previously mentioned, the goal of

phenomenological studies of racism is often to center the subjective judgment of the targeted

individual as the point of analysis for understanding their own well being. Thus, the underlying

intention in perceived racism research is to uplift the experiences of the targeted person.

However, as the dissertation study suggests, one may be necessarily more negatively impacted

by racism if one does <u>not</u> perceive it. Thus, a problem with using phenomenology to research

racism is that it relegates the presence or absence of racism to the perceptions of the target. The

semantic shift from *perceived* to *recognized* is a CRT-informed alteration based on familiarity

with the trunk of the societal tree. Future research might benefit from additional space and time

to explore more nuanced dynamics of the realities of everyday racism by simply assuming that,

any given environment will be saturated with some antiblackness because we live in an antiblack

world.

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[6] The UCLA Cannabis Research Initiative (UCLA-CRI) is one of the first academic programs in the world dedicated to the study of cannabis to properly lead public policy and public health decisions regarding cannabis. It may be advantageous to collaborate with the UCLA-CRI in future studies on coping with racism related stress.

Implications for Policy

This case study supports several initial implications for policy interventions. First, as previously mentioned, further research with a larger sample of Black men is needed in order to better determine and distinguish the impact of everyday racism from other violence emanating from the tree of antiblackness. Such an undertaking might interest stakeholders (Black individuals and groups) across higher education and thus justify support from relevant organized research units, research centers, and/or research institutes within the three branches of the California system of higher education (i.e. University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges). Furthermore, the study provides support for efforts to extend and improve Black life. For instance, the collective findings as well as methodology may be useful tools leveraged for the aims of organizations such as the Social Justice Learning Institute, Dignity and Power Now, and Los Angeles Community Action Network.

In regards to educational policy, it is worth mentioning that in 2018, California Governor Jerry Brown vetoed AB 2772, a proposed bill that would have granted permission to California school districts to apply to the State Department of Education for a grant to fund the development and implementation of Ethnic Studies courses. In vetoing the measure, Brown (2018) reasoned: "While I recognize the value of these courses, I am reluctant to encourage yet another graduation requirement, especially when students are already overburdened by multiple tests and endless hours of homework." In response, Assembly Bill 331 was introduced in February of 2019. If passed, this bill would require all students in secondary schools (9-12) in the state to take an Ethnic Studies course in either Social Studies or English starting in the 2023-24 school year. Similar endeavors are being pushed for across the country by action groups such as Ethnic Studies Now.

The study findings imply that Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory courses are crucial in offering appropriate context for discerning the nature of racism and helping bolster healthy(ier) racial coping strategies for Black men (and ostensibly other marginalized groups). Simply put, the information offered in these spaces may help extend the lives of Black people and nonBlack People of Color. The dissertation's findings might therefore be able to be leveraged as a tool in pushing these efforts further in K-12 and higher education spaces. Although collected data supports the role of Black studies courses in telomere length outcomes, future studies like Dr. Marie's offer a nuanced, longitudinal approach for tracking how engaging young people in intentionally Black, intentionally unconditionally-loving, and school-abolishment-centered educative spaces helps provide protection against accelerated telomere shortening.

The public health implications of the study may also crossover into the policy realm. The Governor of the State of California, Gavin Newsome, created the first ever state-level surgeon general office in the US in January of 2019. The incumbent Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, took office in February of 2019. Dr. Burke Harris is also one of the leading scholars considering the role of Adverse Childhood Experiences and helped develop our broad understanding regarding how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) detrimentally impact the long-term health outcomes for marginalized populations. In her new role, Dr. Burke Harris has promised to prioritize alleviating the chronic and toxic stress in the lives of Black and Brown people. Given our CRT lens, that is a fairly tall order. However, there may be an opening in the western medical system here in the State of California.

For instance, Dr. Burke Harris envisions a day when most children in California receive ACE-based screenings as a part of their routine medical care. These scores would then become

part of their ongoing medical profile along with other items such as vaccinations. It is ostensibly possible to also include yearly telomere-length screenings in a relatively non-invasive manner. This would provide baseline, ongoing, longitudinal data by which families could track and interrupt the impact of stressful situations on their biological health.

I sometimes have fugitive fever dreams where such telomere-based interventions provide immediate and open access to supportive mental health care services, food, housing, and freedom from incarceration. Still, I am aware that such aims are highly unlikely within an antiblack world. Alas, I have also envisioned countless Black Mirror-esque scenarios in which telomere screenings are utilized to the detriment of Black life. With this in mind, it might be important for policy makers and advocates in Education and Healthcare to attune their racial realist senses and help buttress our communities against the mundane and spectacular weaponization of this budding technology.

Implications for Practice

Pierce (1974; 1978; 1995) suggested that a Black person may endure thousands of incidents of everyday racism during a lifetime. Given this reality, "…most microaggressions have to be allowed to pass, to protect one's time, energy, sanity, or bodily integrity" (p. 282). This principle is supported by the coping strategies of young men who participated in the LFG. Feeling overwhelmed by the frequency, intensity, and threat of intensified violence stemming from the racism they were exposed to, the students *allowed* most of the microaggressions to pass. On the surface, this might seem very similar to the SFG participants' strategies. However, there is a significant distinction between the two groups' *recognition* of everyday racism (and between the broader sample of 44 participants with relatively shorter and longer telomeres). These data imply that innumerable microaggressions are in fact registered in some way by all of the young

202

men. They are all navigating environments that could harm them at any moment. Thus, the

primary difference between the LFG and SFG (and RLTL and RSTL) is the extent to which

they absorb or are successful at phasing through a proportion of the blows that are impacting

them.

Thus, there is now considerable, *biological* support for Chester Pierce's (1974) recommendation

that Black men, "…must be taught to recognize…microaggressions and construct his future by

taking appropriate action at each instance of recognition" (p. 520).

Implications for Educational Practitioners:

The implications of this study for educators support the development of curriculum that

helps Black people prepare, recognize, and mindfully respond to the everyday racism grounded

in antiblackness. Considering the comparative telomere findings, it seems as though such critical

pedagogies might literally be life-prolonging. The expanded Model to Understand and Analyze

Microaggressions as well as the Microaggression Process Model might serve as a helpful Critical

Race Tool for teachers and teacher-educators to utilize in support of their students' movements

through hostile spaces.

Additionally, educators should be prepared to help their Black students understand and

analyze the specificity of antiblackness (Dumas and Ross, 2016); in particular, the ways in which

Black cisgender boys and men are Black male(d) (Howard, 2013) and endure intersectional,

race-gendered suffering (Crenshaw, 1987; Curry, 2016; Harper, 2009; Smith, et al., 2011; Smith,

Bishop, Jones, Curry, Allen, 2016) across educational spaces. The participants in the study

encountered antiblack microaggressions from nonblack People of Color (International Asians

and East Asian Americans, nonBlack Latinx folks, Pacific Islanders, and Arab and Persian

students) and some of the Black men whose parents were from outside of the US, were exposed

to derisive commentary about Black people (particularly African Descendants of people

enslaved by Americans) from members of their own families. Even when one has access to

critical pedagogy and Ethnic Studies, these dynamics can be confusing, stressful, and lead to

further internalization of oppression without an appropriate lens through which one might

interpret them. The "Tree of Antiblackness" might be a useful in framing the different levels of

racism.

Relatedly, educators should equip themselves with a deep knowledge of slavery (Arab

and European) as well as pre-Maafa[7] (Ani, 1993) African ways of being and knowing. Both of

these tasks need to be engaged in order to support Diasporic Africans' Sankofas[8] (sojourns back

"home") as a process of contextualizing and connecting with their Indigenous ways of being and

knowing that existed prior to the Maafa.

Finally, educators should improve their own preparation, recognition, and response skills

as well as their broader understanding of antiblackness in order to move towards more reliably

anti-antiblack practice in educational spaces. Everyday racism is enacted by knowing and

willingly amnesiatic avatars (the leaves) of the antiblack tree. These enactments drain the energy

of Black men and contribute to their shortened lifespans. If we are committed to Black survival

and Sankofa (what some might otherwise call liberation) we must all be vigilant in fighting

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[7] According to Marimba Ani (1999), "The term, 'Maafa' (from the book, "Let The Circle Be Unbroken) is a Kiswahili word for 'disaster' that [African descendants of slaves] are now using to reclaim our right to tell our own story. Maafa refers to the enslavement of our people and to the sustained attempt to dehumanize us. Because the Maafa has disconnected us from our cultural origins, we have remained vulnerable in a social order that does not reflect our cultural identity

[8] Sankofa is a word and ideal derived from the Akan people of West Africa. In English it literally means, "It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot." The Akan envisioned Sankofa as a tall bird holding an egg and looking back as it prepares to fly forward. Much like other Adinkra symbols, this image is meant to transmit traditional wisdom and provoke informed meditation and action for those who would consider it. Sankofa implores us to understand and learn from our past in order to move forward. That is, we should *reach back* and harvest the knowledge of life experience so that we can achieve our full potential in the future. We do so with the belief that whatever we have misplaced, forgotten, or been unjustly stripped of might be restored, revived, reengaged, and re-membered.

against the ways we've been socialized to rely on Black suffering for psychological health and

stability within an antiblack world. This call applies to all educators, including those who are

Black. For the antagonism against everyday racial violence is not constituted of mere "flesh and

blood" (Ephesians 6:12), as Dr. David Stovall (2013) notes:

> One gentleman [once] asked me how things were going. I replied with my usual,
> "All good – just trying to make it work." When I asked him how he was doing, he
> replied, "Aw, you know, still fightin' the devil 24/7." Instantly I thought, his
> inference made perfect sense: In the world of…education, organizing for
> educational justice can sometimes make you feel like you're up against evil
> incarnate---the devil (p. 355).

As the students in the LFG suggest, this 24/7 struggle commences in the morning with fortifying

one's mind against ensuing antiblackness and is ultimately buttressed before going to sleep

through actions that edify the soul (rituals of release, creation and connection, as well as spiritual

restoration). Their coping process supports the need for educators to commence the work

internally.

> The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations
> which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep
> within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors'
> relationships. -Lorde, 1984

The students in the LFG accomplished this uprooting and guarding against cellular

violence through engaging in racial counter-spaces. These supportive encounters took place with

family and friends and in formal institutional space on campus such as the Ralph J. Bunche

Center for African American Studies, the African American Studies Student Lounge, the Black

Male Institute, the Afrikan Student Union, the Academic Advancement Program, and the

Afrikan Diaspora Community floor in residential housing. However, the students framed the

collective Black support services as institutional and structural microaggressions wherein

UCLA's willful neglect of Black well being was on full display. Thus, administrative leaders

must be vigilant in ensuring access and sustainable support specifically for Black Student

programs and cultural spaces. UCLA remains a toxic place for Black students and contributes

to long-term negative health outcomes. The university is long overdue for a collective Black

Student Center and safe Black Student Housing.

Implications for Mental Health Services:

> *If you're a Black person in the US and you're not depressed, you should probably*
> *take time to talk with a therapist. -Andii Halloway, 2015*

Andii is a root worker and stylist who spends times with her "hands in Black people's

heads." Her sentiments echo Chester Pierce's who argued that confronting the sheer force of

everyday racism will likely cause "understandable depression" anxiety, and healthy paranoia. In

slight contrast to Pierce's framing, Derek Bell (1994) says, "For a black person in this society,

the truth is never despairing…It reaffirms that it is not their fault…It is an affirmation of

themselves and not a basis for despair." Although this study did not formally account for the

mental health differences between individuals with relatively short and long telomeres, the

participants offered perspectives that may be useful for mental health care professionals.

For instance, we learned that the coping mechanisms of the men in the LFG follow a

pattern not too unlike the stages of the moon wherein their defenses wane from fully reinforced

to relatively low to restoring reinforcements. Within this process, the participants reported

feeling prepared, anxious, frustrated, angry, overwhelmed, resigned, pessimistic, sad, and

depressed. In order to rebuild their resources, the men in the LFG utilized avoidance, group

debriefing, painting, music, cannabis, spiritual connections, and psychological defenses.

Conversely, the students in the SFG reported feeling unbothered, ambivalent, successful, and

optimistic. Their primary coping mechanisms were denial, wearing a UCLA hoody in public

space, and hard work in hopes of a better future.

Despite the absence of an empirical psychological measure, it may appear, on the surface, that the individuals in the LFG are in more urgent need of mental health support than the SFG. However, in uplifting both a biopsychosocial model of health (inclusive of socially-determined impacts across psychological, physiological, and biological domains) as well as the broader findings, this study seems to support the jarring notion that telomere-effects provide distinct data from previously established and researched, self-reported short-term mental health impacts of everyday racism. This emerging research implication is similar to previous telomere and racism studies that noted that Black men who are more likely to report being depressed also have longer telomeres relative to Black men who do not report being depressed (Chae et al., 2016). The pessimism and optimism distinction between the two groups' coping mechanisms also aligns with Smith et al., finding that Black men who expressed higher levels of hope in the future also had more frequent acute symptoms associated with racial battle fatigue.

Armed with this information, therapist and mental health care providers might be better equipped to reframe the everyday and structural antiblackness that is constitutive of the US as ongoing, mundane and spectacular trauma for Black individuals. The totalizing nature of antiblackness along with the study findings, frees mental health care workers to become "street therapists." Pierce (1970) called for such individuals to aim their interventions at helping Blacks, besieged on all sides by the psycho-pollutant of racism, to recognize the toxicity in the air and take active steps to manage their exposure to it. There are certain general practices that have been shown to help bolster telomeres, regardless of one's race or gender, against intensified damage.

General Practices for Telomere Protection:

Current research (Blackburn and Epel, 2017) suggests chronic stress can accelerate telomere shortening. Additionally, smoking cigarettes, eating processed meats and food, and carrying a higher body mass index have all been tied to shortened telomeres. However, certain individual-level interventions are purported to assist in interrupting this acceleration. Longer telomeres are associated with greater fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity during leisure time, and at least 75 minutes of rigorous exercise per week. Thus, it is important to exercise regularly and maintain a healthy diet (especially food with Vitamins C and E). Research also supports practicing and moving with mindfulness is helpful for telomere protection. These can include intentional stress management practices, meditation, therapy, and opportunities for catharsis.

Implications for Black Men Navigating Terror, Tortures, and Disasters

Any black citizen, in the United States, in order to function, must have a hyperaware, hypersuspicious, hypersensitive attitude about how whites will treat him. He must never lose sight of the fact that, for operational purposes, all white will somewhere draw a line against him by virtue of his skin color. This interpretation of reality, if consistently applied, will allow one to survive. Lapses in such an interpretation can be literally fatal. -Pierce, 1969

Figure 7.3

The most urgent implication from the study for Black collegiate men concerns their

biopsychosocial health in the face of everyday racism on PWIs. New York Times essayist

Brent Staples wrote a famous piece, "Just Walk on By" for Ms. Magazine in 1984 discussing the

"power" of Black men to alter public space wherein he describes the daily violent encounters he

has with a host of white settlers in a place non-Indigenous people call Chicago. In the original

piece, Staples informs us that he masks his movements through hostile territories through

whistling Vivaldi in a calculated move to assuage the concerns of his would-be assaulters in the

streets, department stores, elevators, and in front of police stations. He likens his invocation of

Beethoven's symphonies to a hiker wearing an alerting bell around their neck while moving

through known Bear country. His metaphor offers tangible steps for those who find themselves

besieged by threats (known and unknown) on all sides. However, I think we can find a more

appropriate symbol for quotidian anti-blackness than a bear, if for no other reason than that bears

wouldn't necessarily prefer to devour human hikers over let's say some other less contaminated

animal. I think Zombies are better suited for our question of how to move through everyday

racism for several reasons:

1) Zombies need human flesh in order to survive and hunt humans almost exclusively…in the rare occasion a zombie may incidentally bite another zombie or cannibalize themselves.

2) Zombies are typically not conscious of much outside of their insatiable hunger and thus lack the capacity to understand or relate to themselves as zombies or even other zombies as zombies; the only thing that seems to grab their attention…indeed, the animating force of their being is in fact non-zombies.

3) Zombies are circumstantially docile and are in a sort of prolonged hibernation as long as there are no non-zombies (humans) in their general vicinity. However, humans would be foolish to believe that a lack of overt movement and discernable hunting behavior renders any zombie less than the murderous flesh-eater it always already is if they were to be alerted to a non-zombie presence.

4)   The overt goal of zombies is to feed an insatiable hunger. The covert consequences of interaction with zombies, however, is the Stockholm-like tortured warping of one's mind, body, and soul from once alive to an eternal death in which one's life mirrors the very thing that ended it.

5) Finally, if it is not yet clear, (unlike bears and humans) zombies and humans are, by virtue of their etiological orientation, in a structurally antagonistic relationship with one another.

Zombie films and literature provide us with several practical tools of how to move through everyday antiblackness…or rather, how NOT to move.

- Lesson 1: In order to survive a zombie populated world, one should steer clear of overt attempts to corral, study, and cure zombies. This almost always leads to either exposure or death…and, in some more extreme examples, self-destructive empathy for something that wants to eat you.

    o The students in the LFG described attempts at educating whites and other nonBlacks out of their antiblackness as a waste of time and possibly threatening for their social and professional health.

- Lesson 2: Do not underestimate the force in numbers that zombies have. Every so often, we are tempted to hunt or attack zombies head on. That war is over before it's begun due again to exposure, vulnerability to being bitten, and the fact that their numbers will grow at an exponential rate to our decline. Moreover, fighting a zombie or better yet, seeking revenge against an individual zombie is beyond foolhardy. The zombie is not capable of registering any sort of mutual relation (beyond food and prey) with non-zombies. Therefore, attempts at vengeance will be empty at best and potentially deadly. Also, fighting zombies attracts other zombies who converge on you with swift, deadly force.

o The participants in the LFG described the dangers inherent in trying to overtly

interrupt instances of everyday racism without appropriate reserves (other Black

people). To these students, such attempts were typically foolhardy because

individual microaggressors are merely avatars of a broader system in place.

Correcting one person does not tilt the world on its head. However, there were

moments of interruption (through biting humor and strategic use of policy) that

the students thought would provide relief and some sense of peace after having

been harmed. Ultimately, individual nonBlacks are the actual police, and fighting

them will bring more powerful agents into the fray.

- Finally Lesson 3: Those who survive zombie-populated worlds are typically individuals

who (1) KNOW that the world is populated by zombies, (2) avoid encounters with said

zombies (3) fortify their safe and healing spaces and are careful about who they allow in

(4) carry tools of triage and self-defense in the event that they do encounter a zombie and

(5) don't become a zombie.

o The coping responses of the LFG students reveal that they prepared for

encounters with the antiblackness that saturates UCLA. They avoided contact

with nonBlacks as self-protective measures. The students also negotiated their

engagements through evasive maneuvers. And finally, they engaged in release,

creation, reconnection, and restoration responses when feeling overwhelmed.

I am learning in conversation with the words, responses, and cells of these young men (as well as

what I've learned from my own life, my own family and other descendants of captives), the

healthiest way to survive hostile territory relatively unscathed is: avoid being in hostile territory.

The young men in the study who are doing "better" are typically operating with these

principals in mind when addressing and moving through everyday antiblackness. And thus, this

is my best attempt at offering to Black people how we can extend our lives in a space predicated

on our continuous end.

Conclusion

The Language We Cry In: Re-Member-ing Us

The only difference between then and now is a more effective, more sophisticated means of domination. -Bell, 1994

A recent account detailing the 50th anniversary of the Kerner Commission report from

1967 (Casey and Hardy, 2018) found that, despite vast, inspired, and resilient efforts by Black

activists and their comrades, political advocates, critical educators, and other everyday resistors,

to extend Black life and expand its livability, most of the conditions that Black people were

enduring in employment, health, segregation, education, and socioeconomic status have either

remained unchanged or worsened over the past 50 years. For example, there were more Black

people incarcerated… (i.e. Black people living in cages and generating profit for the government

and private corporations for free) …in 2014 than were enslaved in 1864 (Laquan, 2017). And I

recently learned that the percentage of Black people experiencing homelessness today is identical

to the percentage of those who were enduring this particularly egregious socially constructed

form of violence in 1987, when the McKinney-Vento Act to address homelessness was

established (Edwards, 2018). Finally, although wealth has risen amongst all other racial groups

since 2000, Black wealth stagnated and decreased in that same time (Casey and Hardy, 2018). It

appears that *weathering* occurs throughout every facet of social life.

Considering these realities, my mind wanders back to the opening creed, "Neither snow

nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their

appointed rounds." I remember my father moving through the suburbs of Riverside, CA. This time, though, I think about how I underestimated the impact of heat on his body every day. I think about the deterioration of his knees as he walked incessantly in order to earn a living. I think about the stress that came with being the only Black mailman in the county and the stress of scraping together enough with my mom who drove a bus in order to make ends meet, even when they didn't, for my three sisters and I. We have been corralled in this terrifying dance (Hartman, 1997) for far too long.

The study findings may be limited in scope. However, the words, cells, and bodies of the students remain powerful signifiers of the previously mentioned problem. For one, although I offered practical recommendations stemming from the LFG participants' movements, it is important to note that such advice, while well-intentioned, is woefully insufficient in addressing something akin to the noxious climate of antiblackness. Frantz Fanon (1952) understood this intimately. As a humanist psychiatrist practicing in a medical institution in Algeria, Fanon found it particularly harmful to help Algerians cope with an environment predicated on killing them.

> If you look at the very project of modern colonialism and slavery, the project asks
> for Fanon, as a psychiatrist, to attempt to make Black individuals…it's an effort
> to make the alienated individual, somehow *at home* in an alienated world. So, in
> effect, what a psychiatrist is being asked to do is to do something that Fanon
> would argue, is obscene. It's in effect to construct the happy slave. -Gordon, 2015

I am not a psychiatrist. However, when I earned my Masters in Education and Student Affairs with an emphasis in Social Justice Education, I was required to promise to "do no harm" in my work with students. And it seems like a particularly insidious type of malpractice to spend my energy, as a person who has in fact been harmed in PWI spaces, helping Black men cope well with hostile spaces that have broken me and many others I know. It is truly no measure of health, as a Black person, to be well-adjusted to an anti-black world.

213

When I was in school, if you liked the American flag, if you liked the police, you didn't have any friends. Now, I find young college students are very slow to say that they hate America, very slow to say that they hate the police. What we're trying to do now is to infuse an antagonistic orientation in Black people who are white-collar people in college so that their intellectual skills can be enhanced by the orientation that is felt by Black people in the ghetto. If this doesn't happen they run risk of being anointed and appointed (by the power structure) to manage the anger of Black people in the street, rather than relate to that anger. So that's a hurdle that we have to overcome. -Wilderson, 2015

Even as I write these words, I can feel the recesses of my actual soul, my native tongue, being conjured, contorted, squeezed, and drained in order to translate spirit onto unnatural page. It is becoming increasingly difficult for me, from the inside out, to provide any justification for the presence of Blacks in white spaces given the mounting evidence documenting the ravages of Educational Violence (Bishop Mustaffa, 2017). At my best, most true and honest self, all I can say to the young Black men in my study, is that they should leave UCLA for the sake of their longevity. I might say, "*There are people here who see you. But the campus hates you.*" However, even these statements seem woefully insufficient, when in fact, UCLA is just one plantation (Bishop Mustaffa, 2017; Dancy III, Edwards; Davis, 2018) amongst many.

The potential fugitive ruptures offered by school abolishment (Stovall, 2018) and the end of the university (Trochez, 2019) give wings to my own flights of fancy. However, I am always invited back to the "hold of the ship" (Spillers, 1987).[9]

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[9] The conversation is from an encounter I had with Professor Spillers at Vanderbilt University in 2015.

In the process of constructing this dissertation I have been repeatedly serenaded by the

sounds of meth-infused Black suffering outside of my apartment window. It's late on Thursday

night, and my unhoused neighbor Charles has gotten enough money to procure more medicine;

he laughs, howls, and cries, as he takes a short leave and hopefully gains some respite from the

"hell" he's described to me before. I'm trying to write about how a student with shorter

telomeres is certain he'll be fine once he obtains some money and stability for himself. And I'm

left wondering, during the brief pauses between Charles' moans, given the mangled biological

profiles of the study participants, tick-tick-tick-ticking away amongst the backdrop of Beverly

Hills, how must other Black people who live outside look like on the inside.

I am again invited back to *hold* when I re-member that the MacBook I'm using to write

and the iPhone I'm using to talk with study participants are animated by (sometimes severed)

Black hands that are mining Coltan minerals in the Congo. Black children's hands are putting

together the ability of us to do this work (Conca, 2018). "Blood Batteries" reads the article

Spilling Tea

> *Me: (Speaking with Prof. Hortense Spillers) What advice do you have*
> *for moving through these (academic) spaces?*
> *HS: Universities are unique in that they actively hire their enemies*
> *and give us offices and funding to do our work out of. But we can't*
> *forget that we have been and always will be their enemies. The key is*
> *moving and being in certain spaces, but never being of them.*

describing the ongoing violence in the DRC. "Hmm; interesting title." I think to myself. "I

wonder if they'll make a movie about this. Of course they will. I need to make sure to mention

the Black kids in the Congo in my last chapter." It is a great contradiction to constantly be

thinking through the realities of premature Black death in order to somehow fight against it and

then "choosing" to use tools that were created by the very fact of premature Black death.

Essentially, there is no apparent "outside" of being outside of civil society (Wilderson, 2016). The recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made that abundantly clear (2018). However, even at ~~the~~ an "end," the world *needs* Black people as a foil to compare and contrast its own health. Unfortunately, for us, there is also no difference between negrophilia and negrophobia (Fanon, 1952).

Figure 7.4

Study Finds White Americans Primarily Cause Air Pollution, But Black People and Latinx Are the Ones Who Breathe It
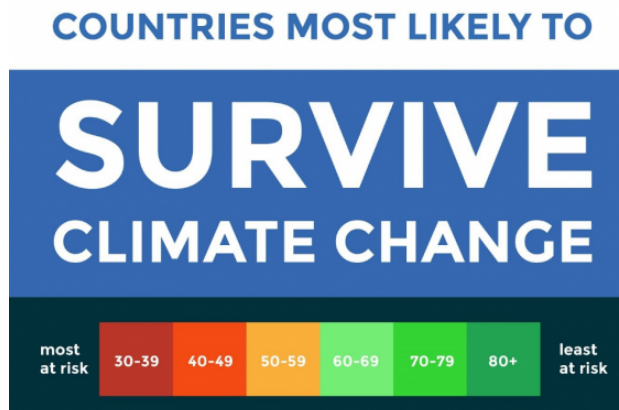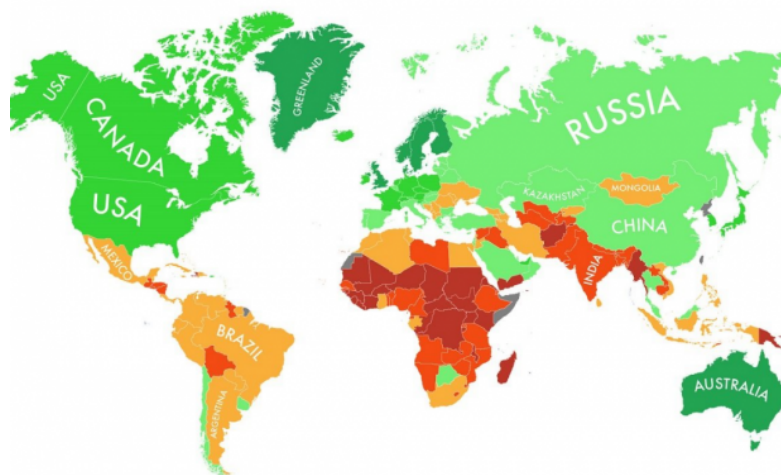
Faced with the overwhelming realities of antiblackness, some of us who are compensated to talk about Black suffering are attempting to make meaning of the *unreasonable*.

> Solutions to racial matters are hard to come by. Given the difficulty of getting society to see the racial [issues*], it's enough for any activist to **give up** and **retire in Africa** or **simply walk the earth***. So, let's stay away from **"world peace"** for now and focus on **change we can see**, **feel, and touch**. The racial progress needed to reform the racial climates of PWS is more relational than symbolic, more face-to-face than systemic, more applied and skills-based than sermonic, and more verifiable and observable than opined or hoped. Racial progress is more than ideas. It takes teaching one child, one teacher, one parent, and one classroom at a time. – Stevenson, 2014, p. 186

"Give up," "retire in Africa" or "simply walk the earth." In this passage, Stevenson, who is most well-known for his work on Black parental socialization, has unwittingly described a now ancient world our ancestors inhabited and moved in prior to slavery. However, it seems, given our present condition, wanting to give up, retire in Africa, and simply walk the earth, is not only unproductive; it may be considered crazy: another word for Drapetomania.

Thus the world is always already encroaching on our attempts at fugitivity. We are quite literally between a rock and a hard place. However, the silver lining in the mushroom cloud at the end of the world is that, as long as we remember who we are, we can understand that this is not our first time in this moment.

> My sister had a partial amputation on her right leg. She complained in the end of being in terrific pain. Even her leg hurt. But it was the phantom leg, cause half the leg was gone. But it was still hurting. So what I'm saying is that that's a *flesh* memory. We were available, *in the flesh,* to slave masters. *In the flesh!* Immediate. Hands on! I can pluck your little nappy head from wherever it is. Bang! "Don't care nothing about who your momma and daddy is and how many babies you got here." Bang! -Bang! That's *flesh*. Another word to explain it is empathy. The flesh gives empathy. –Spillers, 2014

Of Our Collective Re-Memberings

I have been more hopeful in my recent work sharing about the biopsychosocial impact of microaggressions on Black men. The voices and cells of the young men in the study have offered perspective on the power of memory, rooting beyond what this world (the antiblack tree) has created, and the beauty of connecting with the ancestors and great spirit that cannot be bounded by circumstance or time. According to the students, to not be a prisoner of certain past and present moments not of our choosing remains an important key in thwarting everyday racism and transcending the most intimate reach of this world. Once again, Dr. Pierce (1974) suggests we should help Black people recognize microaggressions at each instance and take mindful actions of self-protection in response. I also lean on the voices and perspectives offered by sages across the diaspora. If I had time and space to share what I've learned from this study with other Black people, I would offer them these words:

> I know we are going to lose this gift of Black culture unless we are careful. This gift that is given to people who don't have a prayer. Frederick Douglass, people-

218

Black people two hundred years ago didn't have a prayer. Beat our skin off our bodies. Kill and rape our mommas in front of us. We didn't have a prayer. Now we the head of international courts, President of the United States, sitting on the US Supreme Court, Presidents of Universities, CEO of American Express, you name it, some Black person is it. But the price of that, is to lose this precious insight that connects you to something human and bigger than white folks and…I don't give a fuck what color the folk is. Something bigger than that. We are losing that connection. Because we are buying this other shit. I know that. I know that. Spillers, 2014

We are people of African ancestry living in denial of who we are. We are losing our children to systems which miseducate them. We need to work together as a family who supports its members and who is responsible for their welfare. We must use the most valuable asset that we have: That is the spirit of our people. It is that spirit that connects us to our Afrikan roots. Slowly, we are awakening…The term "Sankofa" from Akan tradition in Ghana, West Africa tells us to return to the Source so that we can go forward with strength and clarity. Our cultural roots are the most ancient in the world. The spiritual concepts of our Ancestors gave birth to religious thought. African people believe in the oneness of the African family through sacred time, which unites the past, the present and the future. Our Ancestors live with us. They created the first civilizations thousands of years ago and they suffered the pain of the Maafa. And yet, they were able to endure the most disastrous and dehumanizing circumstances ever perpetrated against a group of people, only because of the power of the African spirit. This is perhaps our moment of truth. We must do all that we can do to uplift our people. Otherwise, we are still denying who we are and bringing dishonor to our "family name;" to our Ancestors. The answer to our social dilemma is the resocialization of our people into the cultural value-system that affirms our spiritual being. Our Ancestors are calling us "home", back to our cultural selves. We must begin the process of Sankofa. -Marimba Ani, 1994

"i don't pay attention to the
world ending.
it has ended for me
many times
and began again in the morning."
— Nayyirah Waheed, Salt

That's the issue about knowing your history…what we're dealing with here is not just our life…but it has been transmitted in the real life. You wanna know why you have flash backs and you feel déjà vu, As if you have been there before? It's because you have. That is transmitted in the memory that has put you there.- Bishop

In Badagry, Nigeria – a slave town built by a former slave turned slaver – between the barracoon on the mainland and the Point of No Return beyond a small body of water, where slaves became cargo on ships, lies the 'spirit attenuation' well which provided the final source of water for hundreds of thousands of slaves who were destined for the Americas. Following reports of slave rebellions on the earliest ships which killed several European slavers, Yoruba slavers responded by charming the water. Today, local legend still holds that to drink from the well will result in memory loss, a complete dislocation one's history. It is believed that this powerful charm left slaves ready to be remade as the slaver desired because it took from them the memory of freedom. In many ways, the slave in this carefully-kept local history resembles the remaking of blackness itself. Here, we find blackness unmoored from time and space by a ruthless disregard for material historical processes; when read with Fanon, the 'psycho-affective' quagmire from which the colonised intellectual must wrench himself: 'individuals without anchorage, without borders, colorless, stateless, rootless, a body of angels.' At the heart of this blackness, which both preceded the transatlantic slave trade and is created by it, there is no memory before the slave ship. Those various socio-political formations on the African continent, documented locally, which both predated and gave life to the transfer of people across the Atlantic Ocean on an industrial scale cannot and do not exist. In other words, to be racialised as black and to be a slave are treated as one and the same. - Annie Olaloku-Teriba, 2016

In conclusion, I offer a newly informed definition and meditation on everyday racism.

Microaggressions are mnemonic attacks imbued with temporal violence. They remind and force Black people to re-live reminders of terrors, tortures, and disasters of our people and immediately mystify the process. Everyday racism is rooted in an asili that is against our life force (our Ifa) that gave birth to a foul tree which poisons the very air we breathe. As Bishop verbally remind us, and the ancestors (cells) of the young men in the study tell us: Everyday antiblackness forces us to time-travel to a destination of their choosing in order to sift as much energy as possible and then, as before, they try to make us forget.

However powerful this world of the antiblack (anti-life) tree seems; however deep its asili (slavery) is embedded in the soil, it is not *of the Earth.* This is precisely why the tree's roots (colonization), trunk (capitalism, neoliberal globalization) branches (mass incarceration, mass food systems), and its everyday actions (war, mass shootings, extraction, microaggressions and forced amnesia) are being upended by the Mother (Yemeya) herself. The tree may have poisoned the air, but it is not the weather (Shogun). It may have poisoned the ocean, but it is not water (Oshun).

Our hope is not in rooted in becoming more palatable for antiblack tree by obtaining being absorbed into it (seats at the table). Rather, our only salvation (Sankofa) emanate from the ways of being still alive in the ancestors who reside in our cellular memory and who have survived nearly 1400 years of uninterrupted terror. The antiblack tree is rooted in Yurugu (disconnection/I am because you are Not). While our roots are deeper than the antiblack tree and our asili was planted with the principle of life (Ubuntu: I am because we are). We must always

re-member. Our movement must be constant Sankofa of our choosing to a place before and after them. We must always move towards Sankofa and re-member who we are.

Epilogue

The Fire ~~Next~~ Across Time

We must go to the root-the historical, political, social, cultural, ideological, material, economic root- of oppression in order to understand its negation, the prospect of our liberation. Going to the root illuminates what is hidden from us, largely because most structures of oppression and all of their various entanglements are simply not visible and not felt...If we argue that state violence is merely a manifestation of anti-blackness because that is what we *see* and *feel*, we are left with no theory of the state and have no way of understanding racialized police violence in places such as Atlanta and Detroit, where most cops are black, unless we turn to some ***metaphysical*** explanation- Robin D.G. Kelly, 2019

People get used to anything. The less you think about your oppression, the more your tolerance for it grows. After a while, people just think oppression is the normal state of things. But to become free, you have to be acutely aware of being a slave—Assata Shakur

I think we've integrated into a burning house. –Martin Luther King, April 3rd, 1968 (the day before he was murdered)

On Critical Hope

In an initial draft of my personal statement for my doctoral studies application at UCLA ,

I attempted to describe the genesis of my sociological imagination in hopes of demonstrating the

true catalyst of my interests in studying Critical Race Pedagogy and the prospects of

Transformational Resistance with the likes of Drs. Solórzano, Howard, and Allen:

...When the flashing lights of the last police car disappeared over the horizon, I asked my mother, "Why is this always happening to us?" She attributed our plight to our family's lack of socioeconomic security and mobility. Desiring to avoid a similar fate, I then asked, "How do I stop that when I grow up?" She said "Run fast and get A's, Kenjus," she said determinedly. "They'll give you a scholarship to college and then you'll have money."

Despite the clarity of her sensible solution to avoiding the psychological, emotional, physical, and material traumas of racialized poverty, my mom recurrently added provisions throughout my life. For example, as a Black person, she said I would be required to "work twice as hard" in order to "accomplish half as much" as my white peers. My mom also predicted my development of magnetic "super powers" which enable me to attract police officers and concurrently dispel most white pedestrians. Additionally, my parent's social mobility remained static and truncated no matter how fast or hard they ran in their respective careers as a bus driver and letter carrier. And regardless of our collective strivings and momentary successes, my family and I still struggle to unstaple ourselves from the ever present, cascading effects of poverty. We are all also

living as best we can with the <u>aftershocks</u> of our exposure to a significant amount of pain and abuse that reverberates to the present day. Thus, I find myself consistently perplexed with the existential question of "why?" "Why us? Why me? Why Black people?"

I offered a response to this query in the final version of the personal statement I submitted to

UCLA with the formal application:

As an aspiring Critical Race scholar, I would like to explore and support the voices of People of Color who continue to navigate the hostile climates of predominantly white institutions. And, as the only one of my mother's four children to obtain a college degree, I will continue to be, what Dr. Cornel West calls, "a prisoner of hope" focused on the potential of resistance within and beyond these oppressive structures. Thus, although power and inequality are inherent in most manifestations of social organization, I receive affirmations from colleagues and students each day that speak to the power of liberatory pedagogy and the necessity of counter-spaces in the lives of Students of Color

Mrs. McMeeks Time Travels[1]

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[1] In the preface to Faces at the Bottom of the Well, Derrick Bell describes his encounter with Mrs. MacDonald. See the full encounter at the end of this prologue. In the pages below, it is clear that although my mom, Terry McMeeks, offers a similar racial analysis to Mrs. MacDonald, her suggested coping mechanisms are distinct. However, neither strategies are incorrect. Recall from chapter 7 that the only thing wrong with Black people is the world in which we find ourselves.

Nearing the end of the journey in graduate school and entering a new sojourn as a father, I recently reached out to my mom to ask about the advice she gave me nearly 30 years ago. I reminded her of what she told me and shared the dissertation findings. I wondered if my mom would make any amendments to the racial socialization messages she passed on to me with the benefit of hindsight; that is, I wanted to know what would my mom have done differently when I was young, were she to have had an understanding of the future struggles of her children, of the state of the world as it is today, as well as the telomere and racism findings. In response, my mom offered the following statement:

[2]**Mom**: Honestly, Kenjus, I think I wouldn't have *chosen* to give birth to you. Cause, you do know that I decided to tell God I wanted you and then I became pregnant. But I think, you know, I thought that there was something we could do to change our condition, to protect you and your sisters. But what I've learned and what I know now, is that bringing you into the world was like bringing a piece of paper into a burning forest fire. And I'm trying to protect you, but you are paper, and are actually a part of--you're a component of a tree. These people who came before you. But all of the trees—the entire forest is on fire. And I'm saying to myself, what was I thinking?! For real, if I knew back when you were born what I know now, I don't know that I would have ever had you. I wouldn't had any of you. I mean, there are these great moments with the paper--with you all--when I can read you and see the amazing universe you all contain and are capable of bringing into existence; The paper's-*your*-true value and *your* true worth. And then there are times where it seems like that paper is just going to catch on fire and burn up and be gone right out of my hands. Just like that. And I've had so many of those moments. Seeing this place burn you, scar your sisters; It's changed me. I am forever changed. And listen to me Kenjus, when I leave here, you won't have to cremate me. I'll already be burnt up. Cause the reality is, I realize that I was doing everything I can to protect these pieces of paper, who are pieces of the people who came before us, who were themselves set on fire and that my children are a part of. And I'm fighting it with all I am every day. And then I realize that you, yourself, that I am paper too; Just as vulnerable and have already been burnt.

There was a palpable and heavy silence when my mom stopped talking. I was, admittedly, *partially,* shocked. I say "partially" because my prior learnings enabled me to conceptualize my mom's response as a case example amongst many other Black(ed) women captives and their descendants across time who preferred the immediate relief of death or pre-life for their children

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[2] My mom's words are in red.

over the ceaseless suffering they would be forced to endure *in the wake* of slavery. Toni

Morrison wrote a fictional account of this kind of tragedy in her novel, Beloved.

> …Toni Morrison, appearing on Bill Moyers' PBS talk show *A World of Ideas* was
> queried about the moral ground which Sethe stood on when she killed her child,
> Beloved, in order to save her from slavery. What right, in other words, did she
> have to offer her child death as a sanctuary from bondage? Herein lies the paradox
> of political engagement when the subject of politics is the slave. "It was the right
> thing to do," Toni Morrison said, "but she had no right to do it." The analogy
> between on the one hand, Sethe and Beloved...is a structural analogy which
> highlights how Toni Morrison's characters (Toni Morrison herself!) are void of
> relationality. In such a void, *death is a synonym for sanctuary*. When death is a
> synonym for sanctuary, political engagement is, to say the least, a paradoxical
> undertaking. Frank Wilderson, 2014.

It was still jarring, however, to learn that my ever-optimistic mom sought this same sanctuary

and would opt for her children's non-existence relative to the tragedy she's witnessed around us.

I can also understand where my mom is coming from. In collectively parenting my nephews and

nieces alongside my family, I am constantly reminded, that despite our best efforts to equip

Kaleb, Jordyn, Logan, and Nova with mindful, proactive preparatory, coping, and healing

strategies, the reach of the antiblack world is relentless and intimate. We learn every day, that

colonization comes in many forms; insidiously and violently attempting to parasitically imprint

and attach to the mind, bodies, and souls of our babies. I have witnessed these children being

burned. I re-articulated my query for my mom, given that my daughter will soon arrive and that

my sister's children are already here. When I offered this caveat, my mom's answer shifted as

well.

Mom: Well, I suppose if I had more help if I had somebody who was with me and was trying to protect you as well, it would be different. But when you're with a person who's been so damaged so hurt and burnt up themselves, and they're burning you, it's doubly bad. Because you're in a forest fire, so you're thinking, "Where can I hide? What can I do? I'll go home and hide there." But then your house is on fire too. Ultimately, what I told you when you were young, I feel like wasn't helpful because it could not protect you from the *reality of racism.* Is there a book called the "**Reality of Racism**?**

(Kenjus laughs)

Mom: Well, because there should be.

(Kenjus laughs again)

Mom: I tell you what, if I knew back then what this place was, I would try to move as far away from the system as possible. And it's really difficult, because the whole world is based on that fire and it would be difficult to find a place that's not burning. That's how the world runs. It's like an unforgiving fire. It consumes everything. It consumes hope. It definitely consumes Blackness and Black people. Blackness is commodity. Did you know that son? Is there a book about that? "**Blackness is a Commodity**"?

(Kenjus laughs again)

Mom: There ought to be.

(Kenjus laughs again)

Mom: It's like the more the world is in touch with each other the more the more they find out that they all agree that Black people are a commodity and should be consumed by flames. It's like the more they find out, the worse it is for us. There was a time when white people didn't know Africa existed. Before they found us.

Is there a book called, **"Before They Found Us"**?

Kenjus: Wow.

Mom: That sounds like a romance for the ages doesn't it?! The truth is, I am really hopeful for Micha's (my sister) kids and for Ayaan (my soon-to-be born daughter).

Me: What?! Why? (laughter)

Mom: Well, I'm guessing because of your knowledge; you and Danielle [my partner] and all of you are really woke. And you know how white people like to say they're woke? I don't know what that means. But for us I think it means knowing that racism does exist and that the world is on fire. And since you already know that as you're having her, maybe you will be able to figure out how to get Ayaan through the place without getting as burnt as you were. Maybe you'll get her as far away from—get as far away from this *hell* as possible. And encourage other Black people to do so. And maybe after you all, Ayaan won't be as burnt herself and the next generation will be even further away.

I was once asked what sincere pessimism in the current education system meant for the

Black and Brown people who had to get up and go to work (and take their kids to school) the

next day. In response to this question, I want to affirm that my very movements are animated by a sincere and deep sense of indignation against the structural forces that are killing my people; everyday Black people, and the people who look like them, on a daily basis. In fact, encountering the perpetual spectacular and mundane suffering of my loved ones pushed me into a period of severe depression for several years while pursuing the PhD. However, thanks to the loving help of my family, community, ancestors, Orishas and the Creator, I have been able to find new rooting in(beyond) this life. However, I also know that the pessimism and depression are necessary steps in a grieving process that involves accepting what we're in and reconnecting with something before (Sankofa) and moving for something beyond this place.

> *It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting – Simone de Beauvoir*

In the present moment, I am attempting to build from my mom's ever-present and evolving advice (racial socialization); Hoping beyond hope is the lifeline that I was raised on and it remains an integral part of my background and approach to this and most likely future work. That same kind of hope inspired me to write a letter to my nephew Kaleb on the eve of his 10th birthday. On that night, Trayvon Martin was posthumously sentenced to death for being a Black person in an inherently antiblack world. Also, on that night, the most recent iteration of the protracted Black liberation struggle came into clearer being. Thus the same hope beyond hope, involved in what Anthony Trochez calls "overgrowth" continues to inspire me to this day. Understanding and remembering the source of the pendulosity between and because of Black suffering and Black resistance is one of the reasons I get up each morning; It is why I have asked a "…thesaurus to become a machete" so I might write as *piercing* a dissertation possible with my hands on a laptop, even as I, like Dominique Christina (2014), dream of literally writing "this shit with fire." It is also why my partner and I are dreaming and making manifest our own

227

Marronage dreams in mindful preparation of the arrival of our daughter, Ayaan Lara Watson, our tremendous "Gift from God" and the Ancestors. Western analysis may categorize these remedies as *metaphysical.* However, the so-called metaphysical is the key to our Sankofa when we understand our positionality as the descendants of captives in a world predicated on dis-remembering who we were and are.

We have to continue imagining and envisioning a future where we will return to our source…even as we struggle for life and meaning in antiblack present. I wish I had re-membered this knowing in myself back when I began this particular journey. I would have felt more prepared to cope with and be unsurprised by the challenges (interpersonally, institutionally, and structurally) that have emerged on the path. I think more and more about fugitivity and the promise of daily actions of refusing to trust, as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney suggest, that we can ever be satisfied or the occasion of our oppression ever be permanently repaired, "…with the recognition and acknowledgement generated by the very system that denies that (a) anything was ever broken and that (b) WE deserved to be the broken part. We must refuse to ask for recognition and instead be willing to take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls."

A Song for My Uncle on the Occasion of his Dissertation

August 15, 2018

Dear Uncle K,

I wrote this song back to you to tell you that I understand what's going on. I'm aware of the problem and have an idea of what I can do to move as a Black man.

And I wrote this as a song because I feel like people…understand and listen more through music. And I feel like writing this song will be more helpful with awareness and writing this will do what other similar types of awareness songs can do.

We really need to look out for each other and be there for each other. And help educate each other. We can't be ignorant any more. We can't ignore when white people say the n-word or other stuff like that. We have to be on it. As soon as I we do that we can better our lives.

Love,

Kaleb Cabbell -15 years old

Racism is Still Alive

Verse 1: When I was younger I was cute now that I'm older apparently I'm a brute. I'm 6'5 over 200 hundred pounds and I'm meaner than other guys at least that's what they see. But the reality is that it's not true that it's simply a microaggression at least to you and me but their hatred of black people their hatred of my people blind them from the truth. They don't agree that we're anything less than human beings. To them were expendable not at all dependable unless they are in control. Well, I'm sorry but to a black man that's starting to take a toll I'm sorry to a black man who won't even take stroll or a walk especially when it's dark.

Chorus: Every time I'm walking down the street they look at me wanting me to die. They hide their purses and their kids they think that I'm a piece of shit making me wonder why. I think I'm starting to disappoint they've shot they killed just to prove a point it's making me wanna cry racism still alive.

Verse 2: I have a friend who thinks that we should forget all the racism and yet he says he's woke but I don't think he knows what really happens if they get close for starters they can even mess up the best don't believe me just look at Kanye West now I'm not taking shots I just want you to know that they've made an educated negro say some stupid shit though. Now I'm not saying that every white person is racist but it's most so stop fronting. You already know so why defend them stop strutting acting like you know but don't so stop messing around and start being profound.

Chorus: Every time I'm walking down the street they look at me wanting me to die. They hide their purses and their kids they think that I'm a piece of shit making me wonder why. I think I'm starting to disappoint they've shot they killed just to prove a point it's making me wanna cry racism still alive.

Verse 3: Even I have faced microaggressions living in the suburbs at first I didn't understand or get it then eventually I learned about black people and their history that's when I knew that being followed

229

around like I'm a tiger in a zoo wasn't good not for just me but they were worried you see not for me but for their precious valuable things like cameras, phones, and even t.v.'s there was this one time my sister was trying to get off the bus but apparently the guy was in a "rush" so he nearly flew down the street with my sister in tow then made seem like it was her fault though that's just one of the them there's more i bet you every negro has a story stored deep inside all you have to do is look at their eyes wide

Chorus 2: Is this what life has for me in store I don't think I can take it anymore it makes me wanna cry racism is still alive its alive

-End-

Mrs. MacDonald in Derrick Bell's (1992) Faces at the Bottom of the Well

… [B]ack [in] the summer of 1964; It was a quiet, heat-hushed evening in Harmony, a small black community near the Mississippi Delta. Some Harmony residents, in the face of increasing white hostility, were organizing to ensure implementation of a court order mandating desegregation of their schools the next September. Walking with her up a dust)', unpaved road toward her modest home, I asked one of the organizers, Mrs. Biona MacDonald, where she and the other black families found the courage to continue working for civil rights in the face of intimidation that included blacks losing their jobs, the local banks trying to foreclose on the mortgages of those active in the civil rights movement, and shots fired through their windows late at night.

Mrs. MacDonald looked at me and said slowly, seriously, "I can't speak for everyone, but as for me, I am an old woman. I lives to harass white folks." Since then, I have thought a lot about Mrs. MacDonald and those other courageous black folk in Leake County, Mississippi, particularly Dovie and Winson Hudson. Remembering again that long-ago conversation, I realized that Mrs. MacDonald didn't say she risked everything because she hoped or expected to win out over the whites who, as she well knew, held all the economic and political power, and the guns as well. Rather, she recognized that — powerless as she was — she had and intended to use courage and determination as a weapon to, in her words, "harass white folks."

As I do throughout this book, Mrs. MacDonald assumed that I knew that not all whites are racist, but that the oppression she was committed to resist was racial and emanated from whites. She did not even hint that her harassment would topple those whites' well-entrenched power. Rather, her goal was defiance, and its harassing effect was likely more potent precisely because she did what she did without expecting to topple her oppressors. Mrs. MacDonald avoided discouragement and defeat because at the point that she determined to resist her oppression, she was triumphant. Her answer to my question reflected the value of that triumph, explained the source of courage that fueled her dangerous challenge to the white power structure of that rural Mississippi county. Nothing the all-powerful whites could do to her would diminish her triumph. – Derrick Bell, 1992

Appendix A

Telomere Length Assay

Extraction of Genomic DNA (gDNA) from cheek cells in saliva that was collected from participants was accomplished with the QiaAmp DNA mini kit (Qiagen) according to the manufacturer's recommendations..The quantity and quality of the extracted gDNA was determined using the Nanodrop 2000 spectrophotometer (Thermo Scientific). The concentration of the extracted gDNA was based on absorbance at 260 nm, and the ratio of the absorbance at 260 and 280 n (A260/280) was used to determine its purity. The quality of the gDNA was also determined by visualizing it on a 1% agarose gel stained with ethidium bromide to verify integrity. Genomic DNA was extracted from 47 biospecimens, but only gDNA samples having 260/280 ratios close to 1.7 were used for telomere length measurements. All gDNA samples were maintained at −20 °C for long-term storage. Analysis of telomere length in gDNA isolated from saliva samples was determined by quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) using the T/S ratio method (Cawthon 2002), which provides a relative measure of average telomere length from gDNA by quantifying the amount of telomere repeats (T) across all chromosomes relative to the amount of a single-copy gene (S). The average telomere length is then determined as a function of the single-copy gene hemoglobin. Triplicate qPCR reactions were run on the Applied Biosystems Real-Time PCR System model7300 (Applied Biosystems). Sample concentration was determined using a standard curve method prepared by threefold serial dilutions of a reference gDNA sample between 0.3 and 81 ng. The Applied Biosystems 7300 Real-Time PCR System software was used to convert cycle threshold (Ct) to nanograms of telomere (T) and reference gene (S). An average of the triplicate measures was used to calculate the T/S ratio by dividing the average amount of telomere product by the average amount of product obtained for the single-copy gene. Each qPCR

experiment included negative controls and positive controls (Aldevron gDNA). Amplification of telomere repeats required 1× Power SYBR Green Master Mix (Life Technologies), 0.1 and 1.0 µM of telomere-specific forward tel1b [5′-CGGTTT (GTTTGG)5GTT-3 ′] and reverse [5 ′-GGCTTG(CCTTAC)5CCT-3′] primers respectively, and 20 ng of gDNA in a total reaction volume of 20 µl final. The thermal cycling profile used for amplification of telomere repeats (T) consisted of: denature at 95 °C for 10 min followed by 30 cycles of 95 °C for 15 s and annealing/extension at 54 °C for 60 s, with fluorescence data collection. The amplification of a single-copy gene (hemoglobin) required 1× Power SYBR Green Master Mix (Life Technologies) forward [5′GCTTCTGACACAACTGTGTTCACTAGC-3′] and reverse primers [5′-CACCAACTTCATCCACGTTCACC-3′] used at a 0.4 and 1 µM final concentration, respectively, and 20 ng of gDNA in a 20-µl final reaction volume. The cycling profile for the single-copy gene (S) consisted of denature at 95 °C for 10 min followed by 35 cycles of 15 s at 95 °C, annealing/extension at 58 °C for 60 s, with fluorescence data collection. The collected fluorescence data was used to calculate the relative telomere length (T/S) as previously described (Cawthon, 2002; Lin et al. 2010).

Appendix B

Question 1: What are the potential inferences of relationships between Black men's recognition of racial microaggressions and their telomere length?

Summary of Data Analysis of Findings:

In an effort to address Question 1, I recruited 44 healthy Black undergraduate men, ages 18-26, who attended UCLA at the time of the study. These young men provided saliva (DNA) samples for our investigation of their telomere lengths. They also completed a Race and College (microaggression) survey that inquired about their experiences with everyday racial discrimination on and around the campus. Analysis of these participants' relative telomere lengths revealed that the majority of participants, 28 (64%), had relatively short telomeres while the remaining 16 (36%) participants have longer relative telomeres. Analysis of the survey data revealed that nearly all of the men report some form of stress-related ailment (such as tension headaches, stomach pain, and difficulty sleeping). Additionally, when considering survey responses in relation to participant telomere lengths, a far higher proportion (85-100%) of individuals with longer telomeres *recognized* enduring everyday discrimination across various campus spaces and attributed these negative experiences to racism compared to individuals with shorter telomere (less than 46%).

Informed Response to Question 1: The available data is revealing what can be reasonably surmised as an emergent relationship between Black collegiate males' adeptness at registering everyday racism and the length of their telomeres. More specifically, a greater proportion of study participants with longer telomeres recognized everyday exposure to mundane racism in comparison to participants with shorter telomeres.

Question 2: Which racial socialization messages and appraisals of racial microaggressions are utilized by Black collegiate men with varied telomere lengths?

Summary of Data Analysis and Findings:

The collective findings from Phase 1 informed the construction of two focus groups. Ten of the 44 students participated in two focus groups (5 participants in each); One featuring 5 students with relatively longer telomeres and another featuring 5 students with relatively shorter telomeres. A comparative analysis of the interview data revealed that, in addition to telomere length, the focus groups were also distinguished in the content of their racial socialization experiences and appraisals of racial threat. The LFG participants received racial socialization messages from their parents that overtly and intentionally prepared the young men for inevitable encounters with racism. In turn, these students tended to recognized and appraise their experiences with racial microaggressions as racism on a daily basis across numerous campus contexts. They named several types of microaggressions across interpersonal, institutional, and structural domains. The LFG participants also tracked vicarious forms of mundane antiblackness and appraised events as racist by virtue of how they were subsequently impacted.

Conversely, participants with relatively shorter telomeres recalled parental racial socialization that eluded the "naming" of potential discriminatory experiences and that favored assimilationist and respectability-laden coping responses. These participants were less likely to recognize their everyday experiences with ambiguous racism than their LFG peers and were

very reluctant to indict even overt instances of white supremacy. Their hesitation seemingly stemmed from being unable to decipher and confirm actual malevolent intent on behalf of the would-be aggressors. I offered a literature-based definition of microaggressions in response to a few instances of inconsistency in their reporting. The students were able to name more ambiguous incidents of microaggressions as racist following this intervention.

Informed Response to Question 2:

The two-tiered telomere focus group data suggest that Black men with longer telomeres received protective racial socialization messages from their families that prepared them to anticipate and navigate an antiblack world. In turn, these young men readily recognized that they encountered mundane, spectacular, and veiled racism throughout interpersonal, institutional, and structural domains at UCLA. The LFG participants felt the impact of these microaggressions daily and located them on more than 36 distinct locations on campus.

Conversely, the focus group participants with shorter telomeres received protective socialization messages from their families that encouraged them to be respectable and utilize white normative strategies to navigate an unspecified threat of future disadvantage. In turn, although the young men experienced numerous racist events on UCLAs campus they were hesitant to name them as such. These participants were unsure if incidents could be considered racist in the absence of others' perceivable malevolent intentions. Given these criteria, the SFG participants reported infrequent encounters with possible interpersonal racial prejudice across 4 locations on campus. However, the SFG students recalled additional ambiguous events and appraised them as racism after they were provided with literature-based definition of racial microaggressions.

Question 2A: What might we learn from the Black males' coping strategies in light of their varied telomere lengths (effects)?

Summary of Data Analysis and Findings

The microaggression management process of the LFG students was grounded in their racial socialization experiences. This initial process included anticipation and expectation of racism, perceptive recognition of daily attacks, and passive-to-active interventions intended to lessen the harmful impact of the antiblackness. However, the LFG students also understood UCLA as well as the larger United States as racially permanent entities. The students acknowledged that their attempts to cope strategically with that existential and ongoing crisis of everyday life were effective only in limited capacities. In the face of this ceaseless (ageless) racism, the students avoided nonBlack spaces, developed and maintained a baseline pessimism regarding racial progress, connected and debriefed with other Black students and family members, engaged in spirituality and restorative rituals.

The SFG students also employed coping strategies that aligned with their socialization and appraisal tendencies. Again, unlike their LFG peers, the men in the SFG were hesistant to consider negative events as definitively racist; opting to deny or ignore as many of ambiguous circumstances as possible. Additionally, several of the young men to maintained a jovial and demeanor and used humor to change the nature of racially assaultive conversations. When these denial and diversion tactics failed to deflect racialization, the students utilized more vigilant responses in an effort to shift the stress back into their own locus of control. These strategies included attributing racial prejudice to socioeconomic prejudice, believing they would be able to achieve financial success and thus avoid racism, and remaining optimistic in the prospects of racial progress.

Informed Response to Question 2A

The two-tiered telomere focus group data suggest that Black men with longer telomeres engage in racial management strategies that are informed by their internalization of protective racial socialization messages and critical appraisals of frequent and expansive forms of everyday racism. In anticipation of racism, the LFG participants strengthened their psychological defenses, noticed each microaggression, and employed evasive maneuvers (ridiculed the absurdity of racism; avoided encounters with nonBlack people and places). These initial coping processes were routinely overwhelmed by the frequency, institutional power, and existential, temporal force of microaggressions. In response, the LFG students' secondary/reserve coping processes included rare occasions of directly challenging aggressors, withdrawals from nonBlack space, remaining pessimistic about racial progress, seeking out supportive counterspaces, commiserating about racism with Black peers and family, and engaging spirituality and rituals of respite, creation, and restoration in anticipation of another, daily racial battle.

Conversely, the young men in the SFG reported feeling largely unbothered by racism. These students felt comfortable using jokes and other evasive maneuvers to change the subject when racial issues emerged. They also attempted to minimize and ignore racial microaggressions. In the few instances of increased pressure from racially ambiguous scenarios, the young men maintained confident in their ability to overcome racism through hard work and financial success. They also remained optimistic about the prospects for a racially progressive future.

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