The PWI Under Review: Black Professionals in Academia

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Introduction

As the working populations at predominantly white institutions (PWI) become increasingly diverse, the need to understand how this space impacts the experiences of minorities functioning in them has become critical to developing inclusive spaces designed for personal and professional growth. It is already documented that Blacks working in predominantly white environments perceive racial discrimination in their work environment at more prevalent rates compared to their counterparts functioning in more racially diverse environments (Assari et. al 2018, Hudson et. al 2020). Some studies have even specifically explored experiences of perceived racial discrimination among students and faculty at predominantly white institutions (Gossett et. al 1996, Reeder et. al 2013, Zambrana et. al 2016). Other essays offered critiques of current diversity efforts in academia as being primarily centered around merely growing working minority populations and potentially negative implications that arise from this practice (Anderson 2015, Dominguez 1944), with one comprehensive essay asserting that diversity training programs designed to facilitate safer, more inclusive work environments can often work in the reverse manner (Dobbin et. al 2018).

Evidently, a gap in knowledge exists. Understanding how Blacks and African-Americans respond to this potentially distressing environment has yet to be investigated despite being absolutely crucial. Further, the perceptions of staff populations at predominantly white institutions, which tend to be the most densely populated with minorities on these campuses, have been left out of research but are just as significant as any other working population to understanding the experiences of minorities in this space. Lastly, While certain studies have noted the experiences of feeling hypervisible within one's space and the complications that arise when trying to mold one's identity to fit certain environments, studies have yet to create one

comprehensive picture of what it means to Black in a predominantly white environment (Anderson 2015, Dickens et. al 2019). The development of an overarching idea of how these professionals perceive themselves, their colleagues, and their environment is integral to properly understanding the Black experience as a professional in academia.

Literature Review

The focus of this study was determined only after extensive background research of different topics were interwoven to discover a need for this particular type of methodology and investigation. Initial focus was given to why African-Americans do not appear to experience the same health gains that accompany higher socioeconomic status due to a number of protective factors including more accessible healthcare services and access to better quality healthcare services. Research revealed that as Blacks and African-Americans move into higher socioeconomic groups, though, they experienced diminished health gains despite better access to quality socioeconomic resources due to "unique stressors" encountered in having to navigate the predominantly white spaces of higher socioeconomic groups. The participants of the study all completed undergraduate college though the study did not disclose where. These participants cited hypervisibility and perceived discrimination at work as well as the financial stress of supporting their original social networks as some of the main factors contributing to their psychological distress (Hudson et. al 2020). Another study found that more discriminatory experiences among African-Americans were associated with working in more predominantly white spaces, which was linked to belonging to a higher socioeconomic group. It is worth noting that gender differences in the prevalence of perceived discrimination were not present within socioeconomic groups (Assari et. al 2018).

Because this investigation revealed an obvious correlation between predominantly white spaces, a higher prevalence of perceived racial discrimination, and greater psychological distress among African-Americans, focus shifted to the conception of the "white space" and the impacts of its existence on the Black experience. From a sociological perspective, black people are forced to navigate the exclusive and isolating white space due to their position in American society, they

rarely do so without the attachment of the "black space," namely the "iconic ghetto." This attachment drives black individuals often to perform, or what other studies have described as "identity shift," in these spaces to avoid blatant stereotyping and hypervisibility. This more nuanced conceptualization of the "white space" goes beyond its chronological construction of segregation, desegregation, and active inclusion (Anderson 2015). In doing so, it offers a critique of diversity efforts, which in the context of this research, often appear in the form of reinventing predominantly white institutions into more inclusive spaces at a primarily systemic level by growing the minority populations in the staff and student body. This task, though, seemingly occurs in vain if personal biases that may consciously or unconsciously associate Blacks with a negatively connotated space are not effectively addressed as well.

Building on the critique of diversity efforts, research has revealed an inefficacy of current diversity programs in spite of continuing to be employed as tools for bolstering inclusion at predominantly white institutions (Dobbin et. al 2018). This critique of diversity training first establishes how ineffective it can be at fostering spaces of inclusivity and cultural competency but how it persists as the "go-to" for many institutions and universities across the United States. For example, anti-discrimination programs can activate biases while trying to actively work against them and can inspire unfounded confidence in employees, making them complacent in their own prejudices. The assessment also analyzes whites' perceptions of anti-bias training, describing them as feeling excluded at the expense of increasing cultural competency (Dobbin et. al 2018). Even more, an anthropological evaluation of current practices evaluates the concept of actively seeking and growing minority populations in institutions in the name of diversity as only perpetuating the historical practice of "Otherization" among minority populations (Domingues 1994). A critical assessment of institutions' attempts to counteract decades of racial

discrimination and exclusion is explained via the social construction of "Otherness" as well as its emphasized association with race in American society due to the country's history. Efforts to rectify this "Otherness" in institutions where the inner workings of race, difference, and exclusion were exacerbated may only further propagate the racial practices of otherization (Domingues 1994). This practice of otherization likely contributed to another phenomenon observed in the workplace called identity-shifting, an attempt at removing the "Otherness" from one's self in an effort to assimilate to one's environment. With regard to Black women, multiple theories of this either a conscious or unconscious effort to diminish negative encounters like tokenization or racialized gender roles by changing language, behaviors, or appearance was evaluated by a group of researchers as recently as three years ago (Dickens et. al 2019). Their assessment of theories like identity negotiation or cultural contract paradigm provided the researchers the opportunity to advance identity shifting theory by using an intersectional and contextual approach to framing this process; in this regard, the multiple identities within one person are informed and reinforced by each other and by the environment (Dickens et. al 2019).

From this investigation, the intersection of the previously discussed subject appeared to converge upon each other in one institution specifically: the predominantly white institution. In researching instances of perceived racial discrimination on these campuses, one study revealed that African-American students compared to their counterparts recognized various rules and regulations as insensitive and experienced increased marginalization at PWIs compared to their peers. African-American students indicated they did not believe their non-African American counterparts regarded them as "serious" students while others reported no difference in either group (Gossett et. al 1996). Here, an obvious disconnect was revealed in how African-American students perceive themselves and how they function in PWIs but also how their non-African

American counterparts understand their situation, alluding to a potential disconnect in this community regarding inclusion efforts as well.

Another study sought to investigate the experiences of underrepresented minority (URM) faculty members at predominantly white institutions, with an emphasis given to more systemic issues such as the devaluation of scholarship or credentials and expectations of leadership in diversity initiatives. These URM faculty members experienced racism that could be categorized into three different forms: (1) Blatant or subtle personally-mediated racism, (2) a devaluation of scholarship and credentials, and (3) the pressure of representing diversity within their respective institutions (Zambrana et. al 2016). African-American men and women attributed more instances of "being left out of opportunities" to race/ethnicity. Each of these forms of racism described by participants contributed to workplace stress and to fostering a "racial/ethnic tax" by working within these environments.

This same "tax" was potentially observed in an earlier research study that evaluated the relationship between academic achievement and attendance at a PWI or HBCU. More specifically, the study investigated how self-perception and the psychological attributes that arise from either environment affect motivation and academic achievement among students (Reeder et al. 2013). Using a biodata inventory meant to indicate academic aptitude and perseverance in addition to a situational judgment test (SJT) as predictive measures, researchers then used collegiate GPA as an outcome measurement to assess achievement. What they found was a strong correlation between college GPA and the index of academic aptitude among students at each type of institution. Still, significant correlations between institutional and predictive measures indicated that African-Americans attending PWIs may require additional effort to excel at the PWI versus an HBCU.

This investigation of the previous literature revealed the necessity of research concerning how Black faculty and staff members employed at predominantly white institutions function in this space in order to develop new methods for increasing the perception of effective Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion values on college campuses. More specifically, the nature of this research hopes to explain how Blacks function in the predominantly white spaces that coincide with more "prestigious" universities through the investigation of experiences of perceived racial discrimination at personal and systemic levels and their effect on the psychological well-being of Black faculty and staff. This study is also concerned with what behaviors African-Americans engage in response to distress given they may already feel isolated or ostracized in their environment. Potential interventions for fostering DEI values on the campuses of predominantly white institutions will be discussed given the proven lack of efficacy found in some current diversity initiatives. Attention cannot be given to solely systemic or personally-mediated forms of racial discrimination but appear to need to be holistically addressed along with the inclusion of reaffirmation of the self.

Methods

The sample population for this research was deliberately chosen to provide the Black community the opportunity to formulate a narrative that allows for even greater nuance and theory. While this research does aim to improve the experiences of Black professionals in academia by exploring their experiences, it–to an even greater extent–hopes to bring a voice to a group of people functioning within a setting in which they have been historically marginalized and reduced.

To assess experiences and behaviors of Blacks working in predominantly white institutions, a survey was distributed to accompany a sample of five to seven interviews. Given the accessibility to Vanderbilt University and that it is representative of the space in question, the sample population for this research was obtained from Black faculty and staff members at the university. Both survey and interview participants were recruited via email. Access was provided to the listserv of the Association of Vanderbilt Black Faculty and Staff at Vanderbilt Univserity. Members of the Association who were employed by Vanderbilt University Medical Center were removed from the listserv as they did not meet the necessary criteria—that being employment in academia at a predominantly white institution—for participation in this research. The remaining 220 members were contacted via email to take part in the survey and were invited to reach out to the principal investigator to volunteer as potential interviewees.

Interviews explored how Black faculty and staff function in their environment as well as instances of perceived racial discrimination associated with the institution. Interviews were also designed to gather information regarding the behaviors of Blacks that arose in repsonse to distress caused by working within the predominantly-white, academic space. Finally, though mechanisms for creating more inclusive environments were explored outside of the participants,

interviews addressed methods interviewees believed their work environment could be improved upon in regards to diversity and inclusion. Interviews were audio-recorded; these digital audio files were stored on a secure server. Interviews were transcribed and coded to assess how individuals (1) entered the PWI, (2) functioned in the space, (3) perceived situations of racial discrimination, (4) responsed to their environment, and (5) perceived the efficacy of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) values on campus. All personal information, such as names or titles, were removed to maintain the privacy and anonymity of interviewees. Following the completion of this research, audio files were permanently destroyed.

Ideally, personal interviews with as many volunteers as possible would be conducted, but given the timeframe and scope of the research, this method was not feasible. For these reasons, an anonymous survey was administered to address, in a more general sense, how Black faculty and staff members (1) perceived their work experience in the PWI space, (2) perceived their social interactions in the PWI space, and (3) behaved in response to their work environment.

To garner this information, a 37-question survey was composed and emailed to the 220 individuals who composed the listserv of the Association of Vanderbilt Black Faculty and Staff. While the first 10 questions were dedicated to recording demographic and other categorical factors, the last 27 questions were presented in a Likert-scale format. This choice was made to allow for the assessment of general attitudes split by separate identifying factors such as employment position or gender (Likert 1932). Three separate, five-point scales were used in this survey including an "Effective" scale on which respondents choices ranged from "Very ineffective" to "Very effective", an "Always" scale which ranged from "Never" to "Always", and lastly, an "Agreement" scale which ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Survey results were stored in an appropriate file on a secure server.

Following the completion of the survey period, the 27 Likert questions were assigned specific codes for later statistical analysis as shown in Table 1 (Appendix A). Likewise, response choices were given numerical values to facilitate quantitative analysis shown in Table 2 (Appendix A).

After assigning these values, the categorical variables obtained from the other questions were used to create subset samples for further analysis. These variables included employment position, gender, racial composition of previous work environment, length of employment, completion of diversity training, and age. Once split by these variables, mean scores along with their standard deviations were calculated and reported. For each variable, a two-tailed t-test of independent samples at $\alpha=0.05$ was used to determine any significant differences ($p<0.05$) observed between the scores of different samples.

Results

Interview Portion:

While the goal was to conduct between five and seven interviews, because of scheduling conflicts, only four interviews were able to be conducted. The four interviewees were all male, worked in separate departments, were of various ages, and had been employed at Vanderbilt University anywhere from less than one year to greater than ten years. From these attributes, each was able to contribute a unique perspective of campus and administrative practices to the research. A series of questions were posed to these interviewees though, on a few occasions, conversations would veer into matters outside of the interview guide to give participants ample time to articulate their thoughts completely. Still, there were some commonalities that emerged from the interviews.

In attempt to create a holistic picture of interviewees' experiences working at Vanderbilt, questions were tailored to motivate participants to consider how and why they entered this workspace, their function and social interactions within it, their perception of the community at large, and their sense of efficacy of DEI values on campus.

When asked about their decision to pursue a career at Vanderbilt University, one interviewee said, "I was looking for a job. And so coming [to Vanderbilt] was something that I thought, okay, this kind of fits a need that I have right now. It was just kind of a match at the time," citing both necessity and convenience as his primary motivations for choosing to work at the institution. Another gave a detailed description of the pursuit of his goals and how his journey had eventually taken him to Vanderbilt University where he was able to further innovate, develop his research, and help students find their own passions. The others remarked on the financial incentive attached to working at Vanderbilt, one of them saying, "Two reasons for

mainly Vanderbilt. One is that Vanderbilt offered a suitable salary comparable to other

institutions, both PWI and HBCU," while also noting Vanderbilt's location as desirable to his

interests.

Interviewees were asked to think more deeply about their attitudes towards and their

expectations for their experiences at Vanderbilt. One participant discussed his desire to approach

the same with an open mind but acknowledged that he recognized he began working at the

institution with preconceived notions about the space. He said:

> "I would've thought that it was going to be, as a predominantly white institution
> as far as students…also predominantly white…as far as faculty and staff. I didn't think
> there would be a lot of people of color in faculty and staff …in executive positions in the
> school…Surprisingly there's a lot more than I expected…There's a lot more initiatives
> created than I expected."

Others cited their familiarity with navigating predominantly white spaces as useful knowledge to

approaching Vanderbilt's environment. One explained:

> "My whole life I was in schools that were PWI. I'm the only black person in the
> classroom…And the worst of ["some of the stuff that happens to you when you're the
> only black person in a place"] happened when I was a middle school. So then by the time
> I was in high school and then coming to college, a lot of that stuff was like, it was like a
> defense shield was around me…It was bouncing off of my racism defense shield."

His statements indicate that his past experiences have created a protective mechanism for coping

with negative experiences of racism that accompany being Black in a predominantly white space.

Each interviewee was then asked to reflect on encounters of perceived racism in their

work environments and how these experiences may have affected their well-being. All remarked

that they had never experienced any blatant racism in their workspaces, though each took a

moment to provide additional commentary to their particular situations. One remarked that

though never overt, he felt he had experienced racism in more subtle manners such as

microaggressions. Another said that while he felt his particular department had been very

supportive of and welcoming of him, he perceived certain encounters with event security staff not affiliated with Vanderbilt University as racially-charged. When prompted another elaborated, "I haven't encountered anything yet. Once again, I'm still fairly new, so I haven't been able to be in every environment on campus to experience everything and meet everyone or in certain situations," suggesting that despite having never experienced racism in his work environment, his expectation was that he eventually would. By contrast, another challenged the question asking how we would be able to prove the motivations behind such encounters. He further explained that at the core of his particular department was inclusivity, and he felt he had seen those values truly thrive within the collabortive work environment he and his colleagues were continuously developing.

This line of questioning pushed some of the interviewees to consider their functioning within their respective departments to which each evaluated themselves as being valuable and doing valuable work. In general, the interviewees viewed their work as important and remarked on how rewarded they felt by the chance to work with undergraduate students. One interviewee delved deeper into the monetary value of his work and his perception of how that equated to how valuable he was an employee. After explaining some of his responsibilities as member of Vanderbilt's community, he elaborated:

> "That's like the monetary, actual value that I created. And so now they're looking at me like, okay, so this is an asset. This is not a cost. I'm not paying this dude to do anything. He just bringing us money…I tell people that you have to get yourself to the point…that when you're in this world, you have to make it such that when someone looks at you, they're not seeing black, they're seeing green as in money. If they look at you and they see green instead of black, then they can't see the black."

His comments suggested a subtle identity-shift practiced to distract from his blackness and replace it with his monetary, or what he described as "actual," value as an employee to facilitate his experience working at the institution.

Interviewees reported no effect to their well-being as a result of racial discrimination experienced in the workplace. The interviewees were asked, though, to consider the ways in which they maintain their physical and mental well-being. Three participants cited ensuring their personal lives and work lives were kept separate as a means of reducing work stress, while another discussed ever-evoling methods of managing his work to best stay organized and remain accustomed to the demands of his position.

Lastly, interviewees were asked to give their impressions of the efficacy of the implementation of "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" values at Vanderbilt University and their sense of community at-large. One interviewee discussed how effective he thought Vanderbilt had been in developing diversity and inclusion with regards to the student population but had failed to be as successful in doing so among the faculty and staff members. By contrast, another interviewee expressed that he felt while the university had amassed diverse faculty and staff populations and worked hard to create initiatives promoting inclusive work environments, Vanderbilt lacked in being as effective or vigours with their practices with respect to its students. This same interviewee, though, acknowledged how encouraged he felt by the mere existence of the Black Cultural Center (BCC) on campus and appreciated the administration's effort to create a space specifically for the Black community at Vanderbilt. The other two participants expressed that while they felt there were efforts needed to further develop more inclusive spaces throughout campus, they felt their own departments embodied the values of diversity and inclusion in exemplary fashion.

When questioned about what community means to them at Vanderbilt, though each provide a unique perspective, one commonality ran through each of the four interviews: The need to bring what each perceived as a somewhat segregated community together. Two discussed

how Vanderbilt University as a whole felt disconnected from the Nashville community around it, with one saying:

> "So wouldn't that be amazing if we offered [opportunities] to the HBCUs that are right across the street that some of those students can come over here and have the same experience and learn how to innovate and participate with Vandy students in the cohort fashion…That's the inclusion, like that's, that's the thing…Everyone talks about it, but no one's really like doing anything to like make it happen."

Another respondent echoed this sentiment saying:

> "Of what I'm seeing it very exclusive, the community of Vandy is very exclusive. That's from just its prestigious name that it has, but then also from the encounters that I've had with certain students knowing, for the most part, a lot of what students come from is a prestigious background. And so the community of Vanderbilt is an esteem, prestigious elite. Um, and so I would, I would want to see it a little bit more inclusive of everyone still holding to the prestigious name that it has, but gathering people from all walks of life…Vanderbilt very much is a community within the community. For it to actually represent a community, I think it needs to be a little bit more in the wider Nashville community, outside of just jobs…I wanna see a little bit more as far as the students and faculty involved with the actual community and the people that's living right around."

While the others thought about community in a more microscopic way, when prompted, one respondent expressed that the word community, for him, evoked Black Vanderbilt, a support system encompassing faculty, staff, and students. The other considered only his department, when he described, "It feels like a department that, if you work in it, people actually do care how you're doing. It's not just, you know, get [work] done…and that feels good when we have department meetings, and we have positive discussions—uplifting speeches," indicating his perception that his department was successful in creating a safe workspace for personal and professional growth.

Overall, interviewees reported positive and rewarding personal experiences within their work environments but also expressed their concern for Vanderbilt's entire community, citing the need for more practices dedicated to fostering inclusivity in some way. By separating their

personal and professional lives, the interviewees were able to find reprieve from work-related stress which was reported as more often due to workload and hours instead of negative social encounters in their workspaces. Lastly, while each found their own work and themselves to be valuable additions to Vanderbilt University, they continuously referenced how unique they perceive their situations may be in comparison to other Black faculty and staff members at the university.

Survey Portion:

Of the 220 employees solicited for participation in the survey, 79 responses were collected. The analysis of the survey responses overall yielded less significant differences between the mean scores of different samples than significant. While this finding speaks to a potentially more universal experience of being Black in a predominantly white, academic setting, the differences observed provide nuance and complexity by illustrating how multiple facets of one's personal or work identity can converge and impact perceptions of oneself, others, and the space around them.

The first variable investigated was employment position, in which respondents were separated based on their employment in either a faculty or staff role. A significant difference was found between the scores of only one prompt, shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Employment Position

Statement	Employment Position	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
I feel I am given certain projects or offered certain opportunities because of my race.	Faculty	14	3.71	0.825	0.002

	Staff	65	2.72	1.097

According to Table 3, faculty members (N=14) and staff members (N=64) were found opposite each other when prompted concerning opportunities received due to perceived racial motivations. While staff were more likely to disagree with this sentiment, faculty were significantly more likely to agree (p=0.002). In regards to other survey questions, faculty and staff scores were found to be largely similar.

The next variable analyzed was gender. Of the 79 respondents, 62 identified as female while 17 identified as being male. No other genders were reported in this survey. As shown in Table 4, significant differences in scores calculated for males and females were discovered for three survey prompts.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Gender

Statement	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
I feel I am shortchanged certain opportunities or unfairly critiqued because of my race.	Female	61	2.49	0.994	0.007
	Male	17	1.76	0.752	
There have been instances when I experienced a negative social interaction with a coworker or superior that was overtly racially-charged.	Female	62	1.95	0.858	0.02
	Male	17	1.41	0.712	

There have been instances when I perceived a negative social interaction with a coworker or superior as being subtly racially-charged.	Female	62	2.35	0.851	0.01
	Male	17	1.71	0.849	

When prompted with whether or not they were shortchanged certain opportunities or unfairly critiqued due to perceived racial motivations, females and males both leaned towards disagreement. However, the analysis indicates that males more strongly disagreed with this statement than females (p=0.007). This pattern would repeat itself in the following statistical tests which revealed that concerning perceptions of both overt and subtle racism in the workplace, men were more likely to strongly disagree with these prompts though women expressed disagreement with them as well (p=0.02, p=0.01). In general, the mean scores of males tended to lean in more extreme manners—either strongly disagreeing or strongly agreeing—than their female counterparts though no significant differences were observed between any other scores.

An independent samples t-test was conducted with respect to the self-reported racial composition of previous work environments. The scores of those to whom this prompt did not apply were not compared with any other group. Table 5.1 shows the results of the t-test between individuals who reported coming from a predominantly black (PB) workspace (N=13) and those who reported coming from a predominantly white (PW) workspace (N=56).

Table 5.1

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Racial Composition of Previous Work Environment

Statement	Racial Composition of Previous Work Environment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
I have found it easy to meet new people.	Predominantly Black	13	3.69	0.751	0.048
	Predominantly White	56	3.26	1.125	

Of the survey questions, only one was observed to have a significant difference between the scores of Vanderbilt employees coming from PB environments and those coming from PW environments. When questioned concerning the ease with which participants were able to meet new people, a significant difference was found between these groups which both straddled between indifference and agreement.

Next, results of individuals coming from PB working environments were compared with those who reported previously working in a racially balanced (RB) setting shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Racial Composition of Previous Work Environment

Statement	Racial Composition of Previous Work Environment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Diversity and inclusion are important	Predominantly Black	13	3.46	1.266	0.048

values in my work environment.					
	Racially Balanced	6	4.33	0.516	
I feel the work I do is valued by my work superiors.	Predominantly Black	13	3.54	1.33	0.017
	Racially Balanced	6	4.67	0.516	
I feel respected by my work superiors.	Predominantly Black	13	3.85	0.801	0.036
	Racially Balanced	6	4.67	0.516	
If I could have all the same conditions of my current job somewhere else, I would leave Vanderbilt University.	Predominantly Black	13	3.69	0.947	0.023
	Racially Balanced	6	2.33	1.033	

Of the three statistical test conducted concerning previous work environment, that of the scores between of the individuals coming from PB environments and the RB environments presented the most significant differences. Firstly, a significant difference was identified in how these two groups regarded the importance of diversity and inclusion to their current work environments (p=0.048). While both groups agreed that these values were important to their workspaces at Vanderbilt, individuals coming from racially balanced work settings were more likely to strongly agree with this sentiment. This finding would demonstrate itself in the next two significant differences found between the scores of these two groups. In regards to whether respondents felt their work was valued by their superiors, both groups leaned towards agreement

that their work was valued by their bosses; however, again individuals coming from more RB previous work settings were more likely to strongly agree with this prompt (p=0.017). Once more, when prompted with how respected participants felt by their superiors, both groups leaned towards agreement that they, in general, felt respected by their bosses. Again, though, those coming from RB environments reported more strongly agreeing with this sentiment than their counterparts (p=0.036). Lastly, when prompted with whether or not they would leave Vanderbilt, if the same conditions were available elsewhere, the two groups responded in an opposite manner. While those who reported RB previous workspaces yielded a mean "disagree" score, those coming from PB environments were more likely to agree that they would leave their current workspace (p=0.023).

Lastly, an analysis was done using the individuals coming from PW work environments and those whose previous work experiences were in RB environments as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Racial Composition of Previous Work Environment

Statement	Racial Composition of Previous Work Environment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
I feel respected by students.	Predominantly White	54	3.69	0.886	0.01
	Racially Balanced	6	4.67	0.516	

Only one significant difference was identified between the scores of the two groups concerning how respected participants felt by students on campus. While both groups agreed that

they felt respected by students, the group of individuals from RB previous work environments more strongly agreed with this prompt than their colleagues (p=0.01).

An independent samples t-test was conducted analyzing the responses of individuals who indicated they had completed some diversity training through the university (N=37) and those who reported they had not completed any such training (N=35). Seven individuals reported that could not remember whether or not they had completed any diversity training during their time working at Vanderbilt University. The analysis revealed no significant differences in survey responses split by diversity training completion.

The next statistical test concerned the survey participants' lengths of employment at Vanderbilt University. The first test analyzed the scores of the individuals who reported being employed for the shortest amount of time (N=19) with those who reported being employed for the longest period at Vanderbilt (N=27) displayed in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Employment Length at Vanderbilt University

Statement	Employment Length	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
I feel I am shortchanged certain opportunities or unfairly critiqued because of my race.	Less than 1 year	19	1.58	0.692	0.00
	7 years or more	27	2.63	0.884	
I feel the work I do is valued by my work superiors.	Less than 1 year	19	4.47	0.513	0.041

	7 years or more	27	4.00	0.877	
I feel respected by my work superiors.	Less than 1 year	19	4.53	0.513	0.007
	7 years or more	27	3.81	1.001	
The work I do is important and contributes positively to Vanderbilt University.	Less than 1 year	19	4.21	0.787	0.049
	7 years or more	27	4.63	0.492	
I purposefully avoid discussions regarding race.	Less than 1 year	19	1.79	0.918	0.007
	7 years or more	27	2.70	1.265	

The first of the significant differences identified between these two groups concerned whether participants felt they were unfairly critiqued or shortchanged because of their race. While both groups disagreed with the prompt, those of the shortest employment length more strongly disagreed than their counterparts (p=0.00). Significant differences were also found concerning how valued employees felt their work was and how respected they themselves felt by their superiors. While both groups' mean scores reflected they agreed they both felt their work was appreciated by their bosses, the group of individuals who reported less than a year of employment more strongly agreed with this sentiment (p=0.041). An even more significant difference was identified between the two groups concerning how respected employees felt by their bosses which once again illustrated that while both groups leaned towards agreement, the sample of individuals employed for the shortest period of time more strongly agreed with the

prompt (p=0.007). The next difference found concerned responses to how important employees found their own work and whether they agreed that it positively contributed to Vanderbilt University. Again, the responses of both groups produced a mean score that reflected agreement with this sentiment; however, here, the sample of people who reported being employed at Vanderbilt for the longest period of time more strongly agreed with this prompt than did their counterparts (p=0.049). The last significant difference that emerged from this statistical analysis concerned whether individuals found themselves purposefully avoiding discussions around race. Both groups' mean scores for this prompt indicated they disagreed they purposefully avoided discussions about race, though, those employed for less than one year more tended to more strongly disagree with this sentiment (p=0.007).

The next groups analyzed from this variable were Vanderbilt employees who had worked for less than one year and those who reported working anywhere between five and seven years (N=8). Differences found between the scores of these two groups are shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Employment Length at Vanderbilt University

Statement	Employment Length	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
I feel I am shortchanged certain opportunities or unfairly critiqued because of my race.	Less than 1 year	19	1.58	0.692	0.023
	5 to 7 years	8	2.38	0.744	

I feel I am given certain projects or offered certain opportunities because of my race.	Less than 1 year	20	2.55	1.191	0.031
	5 to 7 years	8	3.63	0.916	
I purposefully avoid discussions regarding race.	Less than 1 year	19	1.79	0.918	0.049
	5 to 7 years	8	2.63	1.061	

Of the three significant differences identified in this analysis, similar to the previous one, the two groups under scrutiny significantly differed in regards to feelings of being unjustly critiqued due to their race as well as actively avoiding conversations about race. Individuals who have been employed for less than one year more strongly disagreed that they felt unfairly critiqued than their colleagues employed between five and seven years (p=0.023). Likewise, those employed for the shorter period of time reported more strongly disagreeing that they purposefully avoided discussion regarding race than did their counterparts, though both groups' mean scores indiciated disagreement with the prompt (p=0.049). A significant difference was also found concerning whether respondents felt they were offered certain opportunities due to their race. On average, employees who have worked at Vanderbilt University for less than one year disagreed with this prompt; by contrast, though, individuals who had been working for five to seven years had scores that leaned towards agreement (p=0.031).

Next, the mean scores of individuals employed for less than a year were analyzed alongside those of people who reported being employed at Vanderbilt University somewhere between three and four years (N=19), the results of which can be seen in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Employment Length at Vanderbilt

University

Statement	Employment Length	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
My work experience at Vanderbilt has been what I expected it to be.	Less than 1 year	20	3.75	0.639	0.046
	3 to 4 years	19	3.16	1.068	
I feel I am shortchanged certain opportunities or unfairly critiqued because of my race.	Less than 1 year	19	1.58	0.692	0.001
	3 to 4 years	19	2.68	1.157	
I experience negative social interactions with my coworkers and/or superiors.	Less than 1 year	20	1.95	0.759	0.039
	3 to 4 years	19	2.47	0.772	
I feel respected by my work superiors.	Less than 1 year	19	4.53	0.513	0.011
	3 to 4 years	19	3.74	1.147	

As with previous analyses, significant differences in mean scores were found concerning perceived, racially-motivated critiques and how respected employees felt by their superiors. The average scores of both groups indicate that the two disagreed that they had experienced inconsiderate critiques or been shortchanged certain opportunities due to race; however,

individuals employed for the shorter period of time were more likely to strongly disagree ($p=0.001$). In the same vein, when prompted with how respected they felt by their bosses, both the employees of less than one year and those of three to four years, on average, tended to agree that they felt respected by their superiors. It was observed, though, that employees of less than one year more strongly agreed with this sentiment ($p=0.011$). Other significant differences in mean scores were recorded with regards to the expectations individuals had for their jobs and workspaces as well as the experience of negative social interactions with colleagues. While both groups leaned towards agreement that their experiences working at Vanderbilt University had met their expectations, employees of less than one year experienced a more significant degree of agreement with this sentiment while their counterparts gave, on average, more middling responses ($p=0.046$). When considering negative social interactions with coworkers or bosses, the scores of both groups erred on the side of disagreement with this prompt, though individuals employed for less than one year were more likely to strongly disagree that they had experienced any such encounters ($p=0.039$).

Lastly for this variable, an analysis was conducted between employees of less than one year and employees of one to two years. No significant differences in the mean scores of these two groups were observed.

Finally, survey responses were split by age and analyzed. The first test compared the youngest professionals working at Vanderbilt University ($N=14$) with the oldest ($N=18$). No significant differences were observed in the mean scores of survey reponses of individuals between 20 to 29 years and those 50 years and older.

The following statistical analysis tested the average scores of respondents between 20 and 29 years of age and those between 40 and 49 years old ($N=26$) as shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Age

Statement	Age (years)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
I feel the work I do is valued by my work superiors.	20 to 29	14	4.36	0.497	0.023
	40 to 49	26	3.69	1.258	

Only one significant difference was identified between the average scores of two groups. With regard to how valued individuals felt their work was by their superiors, the mean scores of both groups indicated that they agreed their work was valued by their bosses. As shown though, the younger group more often strongly agreed with this statement than did their older colleagues (p=0.023).

Next, the scores of the youngest sample of employees at Vanderbilt were compared with the scores of individuals between the ages of 30 and 39 (N=19) shown in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Age

Statement	Age (years)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
When I am distressed, it usually concerns interactions that occurred at work.	20 to 29	14	3.50	1.019	0.009
	30 to 39	19	2.68	0.671	

Only one significant difference in mean scores was found between these two groups. When prompted to consider how often feelings of distress were associated with work, participants between 30 and 39 years old tended to disagree that their stress was often work-related. By contrast, the mean score of the youngest group of respondents indicated that they more often agreed with the prompt and recognized feelings of distress as being due to work (p=0.009).

Two more statistical t-tests were conducted which compared the responses of individuals between the ages of 30 and 39 years old with those who reported being between 40 and 49 years old. No significant differences were found between the average scores of these groups. Likewise, when analyzing the scores of people between 30 to 39 years old against those 50 years and older, no significant differences were observed.

A final statistical t-test of independent samples was conducted which analyzed the mean scores of individuals between 40 and 49 years of age and those who reported being 50 years or older. Only one significant difference was found between these two groups as shown in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3

Independent Samples t-Test of Survey Responses Split by Age

Statement	Age (years)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
I feel isolated among my coworkers and/or superiors.	40 to 49	26	2.73	0.962	0.005
	50 or more	18	2.00	0.686	

When prompted to contemplate whether they felt isolated among their colleagues, both groups yielded lower scores, meaning they disagreed with the sentiment of feeling alone in their workspaces. Individuals who were 50 years or older, though, more strongly disgreeed with this statement than did their younger counterparts (p=0.005).

Discussion

While the survey portion of this research was initially intended to augment the interviews, a better description of these finding would be that they complement each other. Each in its own fashion provides either context or nuance when evaluated in light of the other. To begin, of the four interviewees, two filled staff roles while the other two considered their roles to be best described as faculty positions. Though it may be uniquely situated to them, the men filling faculty roles reported larger workloads than their counterparts and a greater amount of interactions with larger quantities of students on campus. When inquired as to whether they felt they were given certain opportunities due to their race, the faculty mean score reflected agreement with this sentiment while the staff mean score indicated disagreement (Table 3). This finding could be the consequence of multiple factors including but not limited to increased faculty-student interactions meaning they are more often recruited to participate in diversity projects, the movement towards decolonizing the pedagogy in academia which could mean faculty members are solicited to advise methods for creating more inclusive classrooms, and the Summer of 2020 in which many institutions commited to creating more safe spaces for their minority workers, possibly stimulating a greater number of diversity initiatives at Vanderbilt. Neither of the two faculty members interviewed commented that they had received opportunities on the basis of race, but both indicated that having students see someone that looked like themselves working in their respective departments was something important.

Interview findings, in general, did not reflect that of the literature review that Blacks working in predominantly white evironments experience higher levels of perceived racial discrimination because no forms of blatant discrimination were reported by any of the four participants (Assari et. al, 2018). One interviewee reportedly had experienced various

microaggressions in his workplace. While the small sample size and lack of diversity amongst the interview participants limit the reliabilty of this standalone finding, the survey results did augment the interview findings by indicating that Black professionals more often disagreed that they had experienced overt or subtle racial discrimination. Also in contrast with the findings of Assari et. al, the survey suggested there was a difference in the rate that men and women perceived racial discrimination in the workplace. The mean scores for men in reference to both overt and subtle discrimination reflected a more extreme sense of disagreement that they faced any such encounters in comparison with those of women (Table 4). Likewise, women less strongly disagreed they were unfairly critiqued or shortchanged opportunities because of their race than men did (Table 4). In general, the mean scores of Black women within the workplace suggested a comparatively less positive experience than their male counterparts at Vanderbilt which could be reflective of the intersectionality of race and gender at play. The lack of female interviewees despite the majority of survey respondents identifying as female is itself a compelling finding that could allude to less positive impressions of their respective workplaces, ones that they possibly feel discouraged or disheartened to report. If Vanderbilt University is ever to make strides in making Black women—often regarded as the most historically marginalized population in the United States—feel comfortable within their environments, these women must first feel comfortable critiquing these spaces. The implication presented in these findings is that, for whatever reason, they do not feel motivated to do so. While all four male interviewees reportedly felt comfortable and welcome in their environments, the inability to compare these experiences with any female reports is disappointing.

When considering the racial composition of previous work environments, the responses of individuals who reportedly came from racially-balanced environments resulted in a set of

scores that reflected the most positive impressions of Vanderbilt among employees with previous work experience (Table 5.2, 5.3). The two analyses conducted with the scores of employees coming from predominantly white environments only yielded one statistically significant difference each; the first concerned the ease of meeting new people and the second pertained to how respected they felt by students. In general, the group of 54 who reportedly came from predominantly white previous work environments yielded very middling mean scores, suggesting either indifference or invulnerabilty. As one interviewee explained how his previous experiences in predominantly white environments had created a sort of "racism defense shield," it could be argued that if these scores are reflective of time spent navigating white spaces, what could be seen as a protective measure of defense is keeping people from meaningful social interactions. The same interviewee also suggested that by producing monetary value, he had replaced his skin color in the eyes of others with the color green. This identity-shift like behavior coincides with the theories put forward by Anderson in his essay concerning the white space (Anderson 2015). Given this thought pattern, equating one's value with their monetary value could be another protective measure for approaching the white space following previous encounters with it.

The completion of diversity training at the prior to or upon beginning work at Vanderbilt University yielded no significant differences between the mean scores of those who did and those who did not. While Dobbin et. al suggested that diversity training was mostly ineffective or, perhaps even adversely effective by stimulating biases within the workplace instead of discouraging them, the findings here indicate neither a positive nor negative effect. While the methods for diversity training, in general, concern having people confront what may or may not be implicit biases or stereotypes they have developed over time, it would seem as though a new

methodology is necessary. The interviewees each indicated a level of comfortability and ease within their own environments but questioned that of others on-campus, suggesting there may be a disconnect with how people interpret on-campus workspaces separate from their own. While all sample groups' mean scores reflected agreement or strong agreement that diversity and inclusion were important in their own work environment, each also agreed or strongly agreed that Vanderbilt needs to be doing more as an institution to effectively exercise its values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Finally, the evaluations of length of time employed at Vanderbilt revealed a number of significant differences between certain scores sets. When the group employed for the shortest period of time was analyzed against the group employed for the longest period, the differences observed likely reflected how the institution has evolved over time (Table 6.1). The sample of individuals who have been employed for less than one year more strongly disagreed that they felt unfairly critiqued or avoiding conversation around race and more strongly agreed that they felt their person and their work was appreciated by their superiors. This difference of impression is not surprising when considering how Vanderbilt has evolved as a university along with the fact that those have been employed longer have a greater pool of experiences to parse through than do their colleagues. This finding was illustrated during the interviews, as the employee of the shortest period of time expressed a certain enthusiasm and satisfaction with his experience that was less present in other interviews. Additionally unsurprising was that employees of seven years or more more strongly agreed their contributions to the university had been important as they have more work experience and likely entered less diverse environments. This pattern continued when the group employed for less than one year was evaluated alongside employees of

five to seven years and then again in the following analysis with those who reported working between three and four years.

Lastly, when split by age, the statistical analysis of survey results did reveal a few surprising differences and non-differences in mean scores. For example, while the intuitive conclusion may have been that the analysis between employees of less than one year and those of more than seven would have similar results to the one between the youngest and oldest employees, the latter yielded no significant differences in mean scores. The following test revealed that the youngest employees more strongly agreed their work was valued by their bosses than did 40 to 49 year-old employees (Table 7.1), but then the next analysis suggested that this group experienced more work-related stress than did 30 to 39 year-olds. This observation could be attributed to the social movement within younger generations concerning increased mental health awareness. Finally, when compared with employees of 40 to 49 years old, those who were fifty or older reportedly felt less isolated in their work environments. Again, this sample group likely entered less diverse workplaces at Vanderbilt than did their younger counterparts and might be more accustomed to functioning in predominantly white environments.

Limitations

The methodology of the study design presents some limits that must be addressed. These limitations primarily exist in the sampling methods. Firstly, because of Vanderbilt's reputation as a more "prestigious" university, this added factor may limit the study's findings to only other comparable institutions. Similarly, one of Vanderbilt University's most unique characteristics is the existence of its Black Cultural Center, which provides a space dedicated to uplifting and bringing together members of the Black community at Vanderbilt. The leaders of this space have created somewhere that celebrates Blackness and allows students, faculty, and staff to feel less isolated than when in their classrooms or workspaces. The same is true of the Association of Vanderbilt Black Faculty and Staff which is housed under the Black Cultural Center. This group is aimed at fostering fellowship within the working Black community on Vanderbilt's campus through community-building programming and activities. Without question, the mere presence of the BCC and the Assocition will have influenced perceptions of effective DEI values within employees' own work environments, meaning if ever compared with the outcomes of faculty and staff members of other campus, the emergence of this place as well as this group and how they may have affected attitudes within the Black community around diversity and inclusion would need to be thoroughly investigated. Still though, the BCC and the Association provide a unique opportunity by opening up the chance to investigate what could be classified as a more objectively progessive or inclusive college campus.

Five to seven interviews were desired for the purpose of this research; however, only four interviews were able to completed. This sample size as well as its demographics cannot be ignored when considering the applicability of findings of this study. Of the four interviewees, all were male which meant no personal accounts were obtained from females who appeared to,

according to the survey results, harbor less positive sentiments towards their workspace than their male counterparts. Though the interviews did comprise participants from a diverse set of roles on campus, lengths of employment, and ages, the interviewees cannot be classified as being representative of Vanderbilt's Black faculty and staff population as a whole. Within the actual interview format itself, there could have been some discomfort associated with participating in an interview one's current workplace which potentially censored responses, though participants did come across as both enthusiastic to participate and candid in their answers. Despite these limitations, the interviews still provided valuable insight into how employees perceived themselves, others, and their environments, some of which were reflected during the analysis of survey results.

In regards to the survey, again the sampling methodology presented a few limitations. Survey participants were solicited via email using the listserv of the Association of Vanderbilt Black Faculty and Staff. This sampling method was chosen out of convienence and presents disadvantages concerning the generalization of the results. The problem is two-fold: (1) The Association of Vanderbilt Black Faculty and Staff is likely not representative of the entire Black workforce at Vanderbilt University, and (2) the sample of individuals who partook in the study were likely not representative of the Association of Vanderbilt Black Faculty and Staff. Even more, be reminded that the Association is tailored to fostering community and can itself act as a protective mechanism for Black employees on campus. It being housed under the Black Cultural Center further suggests the respondents may have experienced more positive general outcomes in their workspaces than other Black employees due to their involvment with a space and group on-campus dedicated to celebrating Blackness. Despite these particular limitations, the survey results still hold value in that they provide insight into how multiple variables can affect

perceptions of self, colleagues, and work environment. Another important limitation to acknowledge is that when split by some of these variables, the sample sizes become very small. Smaller sample sizes typically coincide with an increase of variance observed within the sample. This thinking should be considered when evaluating the significance of differences between the scores of certain samples, especially when the size of one group is substantially larger than the other.

Implications for Further Research

   The findings from this research are valuable despite the limitations resulting from the sampling methodology. Of course, a greater number of survey participants and interview participants would be ideal, but this investigation does paint a picture—if actually more a snapshot—about what it means to be a Black professional in the world of academia today. When split by all variables, sample groups agreed Vanderbilt University needed to be doing more to foster inclusivity on campus. There was no sample group, though, whose mean scores reflected a particularly negative experience at the institution. This is what is means to capture entire experiences instead of simply one portion. For all the studies that have researched racial discrimination on campus among students or working staff, they have yet to simply inquire how people feel, what they are doing to maintain their well-being, and their impressions of their workspace. The overarching feelings towards one's self, one's colleagues, and one's environment could potentially better inform new methods for creating inclusivity on college campuses because the opposite of inclusion is not always blatant racism. Often, the opposite of inclusion is isolation, which cannot be totally remedied by merely increasing the size of a demographic within a spaces. The question now becomes how can universities make their minority populations feel less alone when faced with a predominantly white environment. One possible solution to this question appears to be present in the form of the Assocation of Vanderbilt Black Faculty and Staff. When controlled for all identifying variables, quantitative analysis of survey responses showed that not one stood out as being correlated with a particularly negative work experience. While their are likely many variables at play, the opportunity to be a part of a group that not only brings together Black employees but goes even further to celebrate their identities appears to be an effective method for fostering positive impressions.

The next step becomes administering the survey to a proper sample. The most effective method would be to administer the survey through the university itself so that all employees may have an an equal opportunity of participating. Random sampling could be done using employee email addresses so that a representative sample might be obtained. Also, the survey could be possibly to be tailored to the specific university where it is being administered so that the investigators might procure findings that relate directly back to their university alone. For example, the survey for this study could have included a prompt concerning how effective participants found the Black Cultural Center to be in making them feel welcomed to the university.

A scientific understanding of how working in this predominantly white space impacts Black professional process and are affected by their work environments will help inform new methods for creating equitable and inclusive spaces to work in.The method of encapsulating whole experiences in order to foster effective change in academic workspaces is both novel and meritable and, perhaps, is the next step towards creating a space where all employees, regardless of race, fee like they belong.

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Appendix A: Survey Assesment

Table 1

Codes generated to assess survey responses to Likert scale statements

Code	Statement
n_as_expected	My work experience at Vanderbilt has been what I expected it to be.
n_smooth_adjust	I adjusted smoothly into the work environment at Vanderbilt.
n_positive_exp	In general, my work experience at Vanderbilt has been positive.
n_distressed	I feel distressed by my work environment.
n_critiqued	I feel I am shortchanged certain opportunities or unfairly critiqued because of my race.
n_opportunities	I feel I am given certain projects or offered certain opportunities because of my race.
n_values	Diversity and inclusion are important values in my work environment.
n_pos_interact	I experience positive social interactions with my coworkers and/or superiors.
n_neg_interact	I experience negative social interactions with my coworkers and/or superiors.
n_overt_racism	There have been instances when I experienced a negative social interaction with a coworker or superior that was overtly racially-charged.
n_subtly_racism	There have been instances when I perceived a negative social interaction with a coworker or superior as being subtly racially-charged.

n_valued_cowork	I feel the work I do is valued by my coworkers.
n_respected_co	I feel respected among my peers.
n_valued_boss	I feel the work I do is valued by my work superiors.
n_respected_boss	I feel respected by my work superiors.
n_valued_stud	I feel the work I do is valued by students.
n_respected_stud	I feel respected by students.
n_contribution	The work I do is important and contributes positively to Vanderbilt University.
n_new_people	I have found it easy to meet new people.
n_isolated	I feel isolated among my coworkers and/or superiors.
n_avoidance	I purposefully avoid discussions regarding race.
n_leave	If I could have all the same conditions of my current job somewhere else, I would leave Vanderbilt University.
n_inclusion	There are currently spaces in my work environment where I feel included and appreciated.
n_support	I have a support system that I am able to rely on when I feel distressed.
n_work_stress	When I am distressed, it usually concerns interactions that occurred at work.
n_do_more	I feel Vanderbilt could do more to create a more inclusive work environment.

Table 2

Numerical values assigned to Likert scales for quanitiative analysis

Likert scale	1	2	3	4	5
Effective	Very ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Neither effective	Somewhat effective	Very effective
Always	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
Agreement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree