# THE EMERGENCE OF RACIALIZED LABOR AND RACIAL BATTLE FATIGUE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT NETWORK (AFAM)

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Although little may be new with respect to the lived experience of racialized labor for People of Color navigating whiteness and white spaces, this study is the first to identify *racialized labor in everyday life*. Adapting consensual qualitative research methods to a phenomenological frame, we examined 277 notes summarizing weekly discussions in the African American Student Network (AFAM) over a 13-year time period. Co-facilitated by Black faculty and graduate students, AFAM was a space for Black undergraduates to make meaning of their experiences and find community on campus. We defined *racialized labor* as the ongoing process of navigating hostile environments steeped in a white racial frame and identified six categories: (1) *self-monitoring/self-policing*; (2) *flexing/making adjustments*; (3) *questioning*; (4) *affirming*; (5) *avoiding*; and, (6) *being the change* or standing up for justice. Racial battle fatigue was one outcome of all the racialized labor—primarily anger, stress, frustration, hypervigilance, pressure, and exhaustion along with numbness, shock, sadness and disappointment. Both racialized labor and racial battle fatigue also occurred at the intersections of students' lives in structural, political, and representational ways. Future studies that capture the ways in which *racialized labor in everyday life* is enacted by People of Color are needed. The ability to name racialized labor provides an important analytical tool for distinguishing the ongoing process of navigating racism from negative consequences such as racial battle fatigue. This line of research also has implications for creating spaces that facilitate racialized labor and wellbeing for Black people and People of Color.

The term *racialized labor* is new and emerging. Although other types of labor, such as emotional labor have received considerable attention in the literature (Jeung et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2019), the phenomenon of racialized labor has remained

largely unnamed. Yet, the work of negotiating racism and racial marginalization is part of everyday life for many People of Color (Sue et al., 2007). To address this dearth of literature, the current study focused on the phenomenon of racialized labor in the lives of college students as captured through weekly discussions in the African American Student Network (AFAM). In addition, the current research focused on better understanding experiences of racial battle fatigue (RBF).

Racialized labor can be thought of as the effort expended to navigate hostile environments steeped in a white racial frame (WRF; Feagin, 2013). Feagin (2013) describes the WRF as a grand social narrative comprising racialized language, images, stereotypes, and emotions that tend to discriminate against People of Color while equating whiteness with virtue. Feagin's (2013) WRF outlines the structural and institutionalized nature of racism in society. Navigating a society and institutions based in the WRF requires additional labor for People Color. The extra effort or racialized labor required for People of Color can lead to racial battle fatigue (RBF) or anxiety, frustration, and anger along with helplessness, hopelessness, and depression (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020).

For Black women racialized labor includes a continuing battle of perception in terms of being perceived as angry and being perceived as strong, where ghetto is a synonym for the angry Black woman (Corbin, Smith, & Garcia, 2018). In Black contexts such as mother/daughter relationships, strength may be associated with leadership (Oshin & Milan, 2020), but in a patriarchal system where being strong is associated with masculinity, strong Black women may be unwelcomed, scrutinized, and pressured to be nice even while facing discrimination and adversity (Arnold et al., 2016).

In turn, racialized labor for Black women may include self-policing and racial battle fatigue (RBF) may include hypervigilance and feeling pressured as they labor to hide their emotions, leadership, and stronger personality characteristics. Highlighting the ways in which racialized labor and RBF may be nuanced for immigrants and recent immigrants is also important. There is a tendency to view Black people monolithically although ethnic and cultural differences exist. Moreover, the literature on Black students at PWIs tends to be heavily filtered through the experiences of African American descendants of slaves (ADOS), but experiences of racialized labor and RBF extend to Black immigrants. For Black immigrants, negative experiences common to Black college students such as racism, discrimination, and lack of belonging on campus may be complicated by experiences of loss, persecution, resettlement, and documentation (Pérez, 2009; Stebleton, 2011; Stebleton & Aleixo, 2016; Teranishi et al., 2015).

Moreover, there is additional racialized labor in the experience of minoritization; that is, becoming a racially minoritized individual as a new immigrant in the U.S., particularly for Black immigrants who engage in "bicultural socialization" (Kim, 2014). Newly immigrated undergraduates comprise a sizeable portion of the population of undergraduates in American higher education. According to Staklis and Horn (2012) of the 22 million students enrolled in U.S. postsecondary institutions in 2007-08, 23% were immigrants or second-generation Americans. Yet, Black and/or African immigrants are frequently grouped into the same category as ADOS even though these students have unique experiences due to their immigrant or recent immigrant status (Stebleton & Aleixo, 2016).

George Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015) bring attention to the experiences of Black immigrant students who they estimate comprise 12% of the Black undergraduate population. They describe the process of minoritization as *Learning Race in a U. S. Context* which includes: "(1) adjusting to a minority status, (2) encounters with racial and ethnic otherness, and (3) learning in a community of diverse peers," where avoidance is one navigational strategy (George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015, p. 18). Avoiding white spaces in which one is the only Black person can operate as a form of self-protection against the burden of *Onlyness* coined by Harper et al. (2011); that is, the experience of being the only one (e.g., being the only Black student in a lab or in a class; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015).

Creating spaces where people can come together to talk openly, to make meaning, and to find support for navigating racialized experiences is important (Case & Hunter, 2012; Hope et al., 2015). According to Williams et al. (2019) even in the face of direct discrimination, People of Color often feel they must work to hide their fatigue or irritation in order to remain unthreatening to white people. For Black people in particular there may be an impetus to disguise emotions in order to avoid being seen as the angry Black person (Arnold et al., 2016; Corbin et al., 2018). Yet, this coping strategy comes at a cost. Suppressing negative emotions tends to increase emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and decrease feelings of personal accomplishment (Barry et al., 2019; Goodwin et al., 2011; Pugh et al., 2011). Hiding one's emotions has also been connected to burnout (Chen et al., 2012).

The African American Student Network (AFAM), where this research took place is a space for talking through racialized experiences. Based in a humanistic counseling

orientation (Grier-Reed, 2010; Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019), AFAM is an open networking group for undergraduates at a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Midwest. Although Black faculty and graduate students co-facilitate discussions, there are no predetermined topics or agendas for network meetings. Meetings begin with introductions and check-ins, and discussion is student generated.

A recent case study of AFAM from 2005-2016 found that discussions centered on navigating college life, understanding racism, exploring identity, standing up for justice, and finding love, where race was central across all of these domains (Grier-Reed et al., 2020). Designed to meet students where they are, AFAM creates space for community and helps people find meaning in their shared experiences. As a counterspace in a PWI, AFAM operates to affirm (rather than denigrate or stereotype) People of Color. Counterspaces such as AFAM that encourage authenticity, and that facilitate critical analyses of structural and interpersonal injustice can help people more adaptively negotiate the racialized labor in their lives (Case & Hunter, 2012; Hope et al., 2015; Solórzano et al., 2000). For example, discussions of standing up for justice in AFAM included analyzing oppression, where Black women identified interlocking oppressive systems of patriarchy and racism, stating that "…Black men can't really understand the Black female struggle, and. . . that it's on a whole other level of struggle" (Grier-Reed et al., 2020, p. 17).

Grounded in intersectionality, this work is "about naming the unnamed" (Harris & Patton, 2019, p. 367), and extends previous work on *racialized equity labor* by Lerma et al. (2019) in which students of color worked to transform their campuses into more just, welcoming institutions through unpaid institutional labor addressing gaps in support and

resources. Intersectionality originates from the experiences of women of color, Black women in particular (Collective, 1982; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990; Harris & Patton, 2019), where Crenshaw (1991) proposed three types of intersectionality: political, representational, and structural. The AFAM discussion on standing up for justice referenced above provides an example of political intersectionality, where students allude to the Black female struggle not being centered in anti-racism work or in fighting patriarchy; hence, Black women in AFAM found themselves on "a whole other level of struggle" (Grier-Reed, 2020, p. 17). Harris and Patton (2009) state that "[r]epresentational intersectionality focuses on the ways in which cultural representations of women of color reproduce violence against them" (p. 351). For example, in the AFAM case study discussions of finding love involved examining the hypersexualization of Black women and how these cultural representations resulted in "Black women being fetishized, degraded, and approached inappropriately on Tinder" (Grier-Reed, 2020, p. 18). Grier-Reed and Ajayi (2019) highlighted the experience of structural intersectionality or the ways needs and experiences of women of color were unaccounted for in the institution. There was a woman in AFAM who was "at her breaking point" laboring to reconcile "…her status as a Black student and woman of color in a position of power" (Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019, p. 23), yet ultimately feeling undermined and disempowered by existing institutional structures.

Focusing on the phenomena of racialized labor and racial battle fatigue (RBF) in everyday life, the current study examined notes from weekly discussions that occurred in AFAM across a 13-year timespan from 2005-2018. Although little may be new with respect to the lived experience of racialized labor for People of Color navigating

whiteness and white spaces, the current research is among the first to identify and name this phenomenon in the academic literature. In fact, outside of the Lerma et al. (2019) study of *racialized equity labor* defined as "uncompensated efforts of people of color to address systematic racism and racial marginalization within organizations" (p. 286), we are aware of no other studies of racialized labor. Moreover, we are the first to conceptualize *racialized labor in everyday life*.

**Methods**

We conducted the current study ethically and with the approval of the institutional review board at the participating institution. With a focus on describing racialized phenomena in the lived experiences of students, we integrated a phenomenological perspective with consensual qualitative research (CQR) methods to identify examples of racial battle fatigue (RBF) and racialized labor in the AFAM discussion notes. The phenomenological perspective is grounded in the assumption that lived experiences should be investigated and that the description of these lived experiences are necessarily impacted through interpretation (Patton, 2015). Phenomenology served as the foundation for conceptualizing this study, and CQR was adapted as the basis for data analysis. CQR is a team-based approach to qualitative research that includes identifying biases, engaging in cross-analysis, and auditing to strengthen the research process (Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997).

The specific concepts of interest (racialized labor and RBF) were not explicitly introduced or discussed in AFAM meetings. Moreover, these concepts did not frame the way AFAM facilitators took notes. In fact, all of the facilitator notes analyzed herein were written and archived before the current study began. Thus, the framework of RBF and

racialized labor was super-imposed on the data ex post facto as we worked to find examples of lived experiences of these phenomena recorded in the discussion notes. The discussion notes spanned the academic years of 2005-06 through 2017-18, and we embarked on the current study in academic year 2018-19.

**Participants**

A total of 790 students consented to participate in AFAM research from 2005-06 to 2017-18. Over this 13-year time period there were 354 AFAM meetings, and the mean number of participants per meeting was 19 with a standard deviation of 12. Participants were university students across year in school (e.g., first-year, sophomore, junior, and senior). On average students came to 8.4 meetings. With a standard deviation of 13 meetings, there was a widespread in the number of times students came to AFAM meetings, and many attended over multiple years of their college career.

Of the 790 students who consented to participate in AFAM research, 70% identified as women, 27% identified as men, and the rest (3%) are unknown (i.e., missing data). Students included African Americans commonly identified as African American descendants of slaves (ADOS) as well as immigrants/recent immigrants. Systematic data collection regarding cultural ethnic background began during spring semester 2017 after reflecting on the increasing cultural/ethnic diversity of AFAM students. Three semesters (spring 2017, fall 2017, and spring 2018) of ethnicity data over the 13-year time period captured 14% of AFAM participants (n=114). Refer to Table 1 for a list of self-identified ethnicities. Immigration status was not tracked.

Table 1. AFAM Self-identified Cultural/Ethnic Identity

| Cultural/Ethnic Background | Number |
|---|---|
| African | 5 |
| African American | 22 |
| Asian Descent (e.g., Chinese, Asian American) | 5 |
| Black | 6 |
| Black/White | 1 |
| Beninese | 2 |
| Cameroon | 4 |
| Eritrean | 4 |
| Ethiopian | 7 |
| Ghanaian | 3 |
| Indian | 2 |
| Kenyan | 10 |
| Liberian | 5 |
| Multiethnic (e.g., Ivorian/Liberian) | 4 |
| Nigerian | 10 |
| Oromo | 3 |
| Palestinian | 2 |
| Sierra Leone | 1 |
| Somali | 15 |
| South African | 1 |
| Togolese | 2 |
| **Total** | **114** |

**Settings**

**Institutional Context.** AFAM was founded by two Black professors at a Midwestern PWI in 2005-06. This institution is large with 17 colleges (e.g. Liberal Arts, Education, Business) and a total of 48,120 students; 28,747 of the students are undergraduates. Within the institution, the gender composition is roughly equal among women (53%) and men (46%). The racial and ethnic demographics are: <1% American Indian, 4% Black, 8% Asian, 4% Hispanic/Latino, <1% Hawaiian, 64% white, 3% Multiracial, 12% International, and 4% unknown.

**AFAM Intervention.** AFAM has been in existence for over 13 years, and was originally developed as an intervention to support Black students' retention at the university (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). The co-founders of AFAM were two ADOS professors with doctoral degrees in educational psychology. One was a man who

matriculated through a school psychology program, and the other was a woman who matriculated through a counseling and student personnel psychology program. Currently a licensed psychologist and full professor, the woman co-founder is the principal investigator (PI) of the current study, and she has supervised all of the graduate student co-facilitators for AFAM.

From 2005-06 to 2017-18 (across a 13-year timespan) there were 354 AFAM meetings and nine graduate student co-facilitators—three ADOS women and six men (two biracial, three ADOS, and one immigrant from Nigeria). Four of these students (two men and two women) were master students in counseling, education, and public health programs; five co-facilitators (four men and one woman) were doctoral students in education, social work, counseling, and family social science.

Developed to help Black students find community and make meaning of their experiences on campus, AFAM is based in a humanistic counseling orientation (Grier-Reed, 2010; Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019). Network meetings begin with introductions and check-ins where everyone shares a high and low moment from the week and then discussion is open for whatever it is students want to discuss. There is no pre-established agenda or pre-set topic for AFAM discussions. The topics and issues discussed are student generated, and facilitation is grounded in active listening (e.g., summarizing, paraphrasing, asking open-ended questions, linking student stories, and reflecting meaning; Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019).

The weekly AFAM group meets over the lunch hour in a room unconnected to the counseling center. AFAM is an open network that has met every semester since its inception. There is no screening of network participants and no attendance

requirements. Food is provided at each meeting and students may come and go freely.

AFAM facilitators take notes capturing the content of each discussion.

**Archival Data/Meeting Notes**

The facilitator notes in the current study represent secondary data spanning over

a decade of AFAM meetings. From 2005-2006 to 2017-2018, there were 354 AFAM

meetings, and researchers were able to locate notes for 277 (78%) of those meetings.

There were two semesters (spring 2010 and fall 2012) for which researchers were

unable to locate any notes.

Unlike firsthand accounts of students telling their stories, the secondary dataset

consists of facilitators summarizing students' discussions. Akin to counseling notes,

these discussion notes were originally created for practical purposes (i.e., documenting

the content of discussions from week to week to inform practice) rather than for

research purposes. Consequently, with the exception of two semesters, when the

notetaker was instructed to use the Data/Assessment/Plan (DAP) format, the discussion

notes are written in free form—typically one paragraph, single spaced, one half page or

less. With the exception of the experimentation with DAP, facilitators were not required

to follow a specific protocol for note taking but were asked to capture the content of the

discussion each week. Most facilitators took notes during meetings, where meetings

were loosely structured to begin with introductions and check-ins followed by open

discussion. The PI provided ongoing supervision to graduate co-facilitators and

instructed facilitators to turn in discussion notes within one week of the meeting date.

The PI maintained these notes in the AFAM archive.

**Research Team**

The research team included three people—one AFAM facilitator who is a professor in family social science and two AFAM outsiders who are doctoral students in family social science. The PI was the AFAM insider on the research team. The doctoral students who identified as white women did not participate in AFAM. Recognizing the potential for unequal power dynamics between the professor and doctoral students, the PI operated from a feminist perspective to empower all team members. The ratio of two doctoral student AFAM outsiders to one professor/AFAM insider also helped to ensure voice across different perspectives.

To create a common baseline of understanding before analysis began, the PI provided the research team with readings on critical race theory (e.g., Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The team discussed these readings and then reviewed and discussed the literature on RBF. Reflexivity was important throughout the process. The research team began the process of reflexivity by individually drafting positionality statements in writing. They reflected on their social positionality (e.g., race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) and the ways their positionality (including insider/outsider status) might influence their approach to the research. They also reflected on the ways they expected to be challenged and confirmed through the research. Finally, each individual team member identified their biases (i.e., what they expected to find in the discussion notes). All expected to find instances of racism discussed in AFAM.

**Auditor.** An internal auditor was included to strengthen the research. According to Hill et al. (2005):

> [T]he auditor's role is to check whether the raw material is in the correct domain, that all important material has been faithfully represented in the core ideas, that

> the wording of the core ideas succinctly captures the essence of the raw data, and that the cross-analysis elegantly and faithfully represents the data. (p. 201)

Researchers may use an internal auditor or an external auditor (Hill et al., 2005). Given that our research team was comprised of two white women who were AFAM outsiders and only one African American woman and AFAM insider, we chose an auditor who was also an AFAM insider; that is, deeply familiar with the content of the group, note taking, and weekly meetings. The auditor was an ADOS man and MA/PhD student in family social science who co-facilitated AFAM meetings during the 2018-19 school year. In addition, the auditor was someone who himself had navigated a PWI as an undergraduate. From a phenomenological perspective choosing an auditor with insight into the experience under study seemed essential to checking our understanding and rendering of the phenomenon.

**Analysis**

**Unit of Analysis.** Group discussion synthesized via the AFAM facilitator note was the unit of analysis. As previously mentioned, the discussion notes were secondary data (i.e., summaries of experiences filtered through the lens of the facilitator) rather than firsthand student accounts. Unlike transcripts where information is recorded verbatim and by speaker, AFAM facilitator notes were not exact recordings but summaries of the discussion that occurred. Hence, individual level analysis or identifying who said what was not possible. Moreover, AFAM meetings were open, with no screening, hosting students across ethnicities and years in school in a single meeting. Consequently, unless a specific identity became the focus of discussion as indicated by the facilitator note, researchers were unable to parse issues by student group or specific identities.

**Coding/Operational Definitions.** The research team began by individually reading all 277 discussion notes and then meeting to talk through questions and general observations and to develop a coding scheme for RBF. The operational definition of RBF derived from the literature, specifically Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) and was informed by the initial read of the facilitator notes. Researchers included a sub-code for intersectionality. All data were coded individually.

Table 2. *Excerpt of Final Coding Scheme*

| | |
|---|---|
| Racialized Labor (RL) | Navigating a collective Black identity and individual identity, stereotypes, and whiteness/white spaces including the work of physical avoidance, withdrawal, escapism, dissociation, assimilation, code-switching, explaining, resistance (verbally, non-verbally, physically fighting back), and making adjustments that presumably white people don't have to make. |
| Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) | 1. Frustration, anger<br>2. Exhaustion<br>3. Hypervigilance<br>4. Acceptance of racist attributions, e.g., self-hate, inferiority<br>5. Sadness/hopelessness<br>6. Numbness/shock<br>7. Other (e.g., pressure or guilt) |

Once individual coding was complete, the research team engaged in peer debriefing. During the first meeting, the team experienced issues with inconsistent coding of data that seemed related to but not prototypical of RBF. In this discussion, the PI coined the term *racialized labor* to capture this subset of data. The research team agreed that this term seemed to capture the essence of this dataset and revised the coding scheme for both RBF and racialized labor (refer to Table 2). Using the revised

coding scheme, the team engaged in the consensual process described below to complete the analysis.

**Consensual Process.** Developing consensus is an essential component of CQR that builds trustworthiness into the research. As part of the consensual process, the research team met in person, and each member presented her individually coded data to the other team members to determine whether there was consistency. Through consensus, individually coded data were amended by the team to fit the revised codes in Table 2 for RBF and racialized labor. All research team members had to agree before data were coded on to the master document. When there were disagreements that were not immediately resolvable, the research team used a "parking lot" method, coming back to that data at a later time. At the end of the consensual process, there were no data left in the "parking lot."

Reflexivity throughout this process was important and highlighted interesting dynamics. For example, the research team observed and discussed how the African American woman seemed most sensitized to racialized labor and tended to identify labor when others did not. The team also reflected on differences in lived experience, where others on the team were more sensitized to issues of shame or rejection.

**Internal Audit**. The auditor on the research project evaluated the team's consensual analysis by reading all of the discussion notes in their original form, individually coding the discussion notes for racialized labor, and reviewing and providing feedback on the research team's master coding document. This included determining whether the raw data were in the correct domains and whether ideas were faithfully represented. When the audit was complete, the research team reviewed the audit and

met with the auditor to discuss findings. In discussion with the auditor, the team re-examined racialized labor and RBF codes for nine meetings. As a result of the discussion, the team and auditor agreed that one of the racialized labor codes would be more accurately coded as intersectional racialized labor.

**Member Checking.** An additional way to strengthen analysis is via member checking; that is turning over the analysis and findings to participants for feedback. In the current study, the PI asked former AFAM participants to review and provide feedback on the analysis. One was a Liberian American woman who attended 23 AFAM meetings as an undergraduate during the 2011-2012 academic year. Another was a Somali American woman who participated in 20 AFAM meetings from 2016 to 2020. The third was an ADOS woman who attended two AFAM meetings from 2017 to 2020. Importantly and like our auditor, all had the lived experience of being a Black undergraduate at a PWI to inform their ability to check whether the aspects of racialized labor and RBF emerging from our secondary dataset faithfully captured aspects of the lived experience of these phenomena.

Member checking affirmed evidence of RBF across 54 AFAM meetings, and provided increased precision for three RBF codes, where researchers failed to indicate the specific aspect of RBF via numbers 1-7 as indicated in Table 2. In addition, the member check resulted in identifying three examples of RBF originally coded as "acceptance of racist attributions" as other aspects of RBF (i.e., frustration/anger, hypervigilance, or other). The member check also resulted in adding an intersectionality code to one racialized labor code.

**Findings**

Across 277 notes there were examples of racialized labor in 91 meetings and examples of racial battle fatigue (RBF) in 54 meetings. Importantly, as previously discussed, these concepts were not explicitly introduced in AFAM meetings and did not frame the way facilitators recorded their notes. Rather, racialized labor and RBF were super-imposed on the data ex post facto by the researchers, and in 33 meetings researchers found evidence of both phenomena recorded by facilitators, e.g., students talking about the work of being a Black student on a white campus (i.e., racialized labor) and how exhausting it was (i.e., RBF). The analysis of these secondary data suggest that racialized labor for AFAM students included questioning, navigating stereotypes, codeswitching, self-monitoring, self-protection, and resistance. Unsurprisingly, racial battle fatigue (RBF) seemed based in hypervigilance stemming from an accumulation of racialized experiences that left students feeling frustrated and angry, exhausted and disappointed, shocked and offended, pressured and guilty. In addition, intersectionality was apparent in each of these domains. Across 24 meetings, researchers identified aspects of intersectional racialized labor, and in two meetings, researchers identified aspects of intersectional RBF.

**Racialized Labor**

Racialized labor included the acts students engaged in to navigate oppressive systems. For AFAM students, core sources of labor included codeswitching, self-monitoring, self-protection, and resistance. Simultaneously adjusting to and critiquing whiteness while affirming and defining Blackness were also core sources of labor. In addition, we found evidence of *racialized equity labor.* Table 3 provides an overview of

the core sources of labor organized into six categories: self-monitoring; flexing;

questioning; affirming; avoiding; and being the change. These categories are

synthesized in the discussion that follows.

Table 3. *Categories of Core Sources of Racialized Labor*

| Category 1: Self-Monitoring | Self-Monitoring and self-policing; navigating respectability politics |
|---|---|
| Category 2: Flexing | Codeswitching, making adjustments, acclimating, and accommodating white people in white spaces |
| Category 3: Questioning | Questioning oneself; making meaning of racialized events; critiquing and resisting whiteness |
| Category 4: Affirming | Affirming and defining Blackness; hanging on to cultural identity |
| Category 5: Avoiding | Self-protection; avoiding certain places, people, topics, and issues when necessary |
| Category 6: Being the Change | Standing up for justice and/or engaging in racialized equity labor |

**Self-Monitoring, Flexing, and Questioning.** Depending on the context and

environment for example, students shared stories of having to frequently codeswitch or

change their language. Navigating communities on and off campus involved switching it

up to fit in with the surrounding community, space, or people. For example, one

facilitator notes:

> The students discussed feeling as though they have to have separate selves they have when they are comfortable and when they are not. The students discussed how this looks in their academic lives on campus sharing they often feel like they have to act like someone they are not in classes and on campus.

In many ways this connected to the work of encountering a white racial frame

reported by Grier-Reed, Gagner, and Ajayi (2018), where "there seemed to be little

room for students' authentic Black selves in classes at their PWI" (p. 74). The authors

found Black students discussing "how it seems like they need to develop a new

language just for conversing with the dominant culture…feigning interests in things

because these are the things they are supposed to like, usually based on white

standards" (Grier-Reed et al., 2018, pp. 74-75). Here, respectability politics seemed at play, where Okello (2020) defines the politics of respectability as "the active adoption of standards rooted in whiteness as a regulatory instrument of one's behavior and emotions" (p. 1).

In the current study, there was the perception that students had to work at making other people comfortable. One facilitator captured an example of this racialized labor in a conversation where students discussed "the self-monitoring that African Americans need to do in order to be approachable." In another facilitator note one student questioned: "[W]hy can't I just be me all the time, why do I have to switch to more mainstream, standard received English in certain situations?"

**Flexing, Questioning, and Affirming**. Figuring out how to acclimate to a white campus environment while trying to maintain a Black identity was a major source of labor. This was a complicated balance of encountering and countering a white racial frame that denigrates Blackness, where AFAM students worked to fit in but to also maintain a "sense of integrity and authenticity [by] . . . valuing Blackness and Black culture" (Grier-Reed et al., 2018, p. 76). This labor involved critiquing whiteness and re-examining Blackness, where students sought to define themselves outside of a white racial frame (Grier-Reed et al., 2018). Below is an excerpt from an AFAM note exemplifying the examination of Blackness:

> Group explored what it means to be Black. Conversation started with narrow definitions of Blackness. Questions of what makes someone less Black emerged. Students explored how far they could deviate from stereotypes without deviating from what it means to be Black. The question of does being educated make you less Black emerged. In the end students decided that there was nothing that could make you less Black except denying your sense of yourself as Black. (Grier-Reed et al., 2018, p. 78)

Extending the Grier-Reed et al. (2020) case study of AFAM, we also found identity exploration to be a major touchstone, where students explored their individual identities in the context of a collective Black identity. In the current study, this included students questioning whether their Black identity impacted their academic, community, and personal success on campus. They also questioned losing their Black identity in the pursuit of success. As one facilitator summed it up, students tried to work through "concerns about how acclimation to the campus environment may lead to assimilation." The findings in the current study crystallize the racialized labor alluded to in previous studies, where in (en)countering a white racial frame, AFAM students labored to affirm their Black identities, develop healthy esteem, and avoid selling out (Grier-Reed et al., 2018; 2020).

Defining their Black identities outside of stereotypes was a core source of labor. As noted in one facilitator note: "The general belief is that the images and words used in our society stem from and reflect negative perceptions of minority groups." In turn, students engaged in many conversations about how to navigate negative stereotypes exacerbated through popular culture and media.

**Questioning/Resisting vs. Self-Protection/Avoidance**. As reported by Grier-Reed et al. (2018), protecting themselves was important. In the current study, we found that at times, students endorsed "self-protection" or avoidance and at other times, they proposed resistance. Students used the AFAM group to brainstorm about the best ways to navigate racial incidents in the white spaces in which they found themselves. For example, one facilitator notes:

> Then students talked about how difficult it is to have a difficult discussion about social

justice issues, especially around white privilege/supremacy. One student shared the perception that many of these conversations need to happen in a way where white people feel validated, otherwise they get defensive. As such, as one student put it, one has to balance calling white people out with 'white fragility.'

The current findings bring into focus the ways in which students labored to understand white dominance, protect themselves from it, and push back against it. This extends previous research such as the AFAM case study in which understanding racism was central as students struggled to navigate explicit and more covert forms of racism, "trying to understand how best to respond" (Grier-Reed et al., 2020, p. 15). The current findings also better conceptualize the previously reported cognitive and emotional labor identified by Grier-Reed et al. (2018) as simply *racialized labor*, where AFAM students' labored to protect "themselves from the negative effects of the hostile environment created by the WRF" [white racial frame, p. 80] and to "stand up or confront and educate others" (p. 79).

**Being the Change and Racialized Equity Labor**. Making changes on campus or the *racialized equity labor* introduced by Lerma et al. (2019) was also a core source of labor. See below for an example from one meeting.

> As one student asked what can you do as a student to make your voice heard, other students shared ways they have pushed back. Specifically, one student shared how he and two other students banded together to keep the university from reducing the time allowed for MCAE [Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence] during orientation, and the importance of connecting with like-minded people to discuss issues and injustices.

In other words, *racialized equity labor* (or uncompensated efforts to make their university more equitable) seemed to be part and parcel of students' racialized labor in everyday life. For example, Grier-Reed et al. (2020) found that getting involved, standing up, and building allies for justice was a theme in AFAM discussions, including

students: "questioning their responsibility for educating others, struggling with ways to make the campus feel more safe . . . and finding ways to be a part of change in the University community" (p. 16). However, *being the change* extended beyond just making changes at their PWI. Students also discussed working to make positive change in the Black community and in society at large (Grier-Reed et al., 2020).

**Racial Battle Fatigue**

Grier-Reed et al. (2018) discussed the emotional toll of navigating a white racial frame as "anger, frustration, stress, exhaustion, and resentment" (p. 80). In the current study, we conceptualize this as racial battle fatigue. It was difficult to be part of a small number of a tiny minority on campus, and in the current study "students talked about feeling the strain of being a Black student on a primarily white campus."

The underrepresentation was frustrating in that white spaces on campus did not seem to leave room for the identities of People of Color as discussed by one student in the following facilitator note: "She described her frustration of being one of two students of color in this class and not feeling as though the teacher created space for the students' of color experiences." On the other hand, students described feeling pressured as reported in the case study of AFAM, where: "Students shared stories of feeling the pressure to write about race because they were the only Black person in class and/or feeling picked on to represent their group" (Grier-Reed et al., 2020, p. 13). Pressure and frustrations within the college environment were complicated by external pressure from family and community to succeed.

In one meeting: "They discussed the difficulties in making these adjustments including feeling angry and feeling resentful of their majority peers." Students also

expressed guilt. As noted by one facilitator: "Some of the students shared that they often feel 'bad' for feeling this way about their classmates."

Sadness and disappointment were expressed at AFAM meetings, particularly when students felt that racism was not getting better in this country. Moreover, galvanizing events such as the 2016 election were shocking. In one meeting after the election, the facilitator noted that: "Some [students] discussed still being in shock while others felt numb."

Along with the frustration, anger, disappointment, shock, guilt, and pressure, students expressed fatigue. This is captured in one meeting, where the facilitator noted that: "There was also a sense of exhaustion about being a person of color on a primarily white campus." When considered in light of the Grier-Reed et al. (2020) case study where students discussed the difficulties of navigating college life at a PWI, including isolation and underrepresentation, the sense of exhaustion is not surprising. In fact, the predominantly white environment seemed to heighten students' sensitivity to others' attitudes about diversity and contribute to hypervigilance (Grier-Reed et al., 2018), where students not only experienced heightened awareness associated with cultural mistrust and paranoia, but also engaged in the racialized labor of questioning whether their vigilance was warranted.

**Intersectionality**

As stated earlier, intersectionality originates from the experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990) with the goal of "naming the unnamed" (Harris & Patton, 2019, p. 367) as it relates to the political, representational, and structural oppression that Black women face (Crenshaw, 1991). Given that 70% of AFAM

participants were women, it is unsurprising that experiences of racialized labor and racial battle fatigue also emerged in intersectional ways. These experiences were primarily centered at the representational and structural levels of intersectionality.

**Intersectional Racial Battle Fatigue.** Intersectional racial battle fatigue (RBF) included the frustration of being disrespected, disregarded, and unsupported as a woman of color in a position of authority (e.g., as a teaching assistant or community adviser in the dorm) (Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019). These experiences highlighted structural intersectionality or gaps in resources and support for Black women at the institution. Intersectional RBF also included the seeming acceptance of racist attributions characterizing ADOS. For example, there was 'discussion about the way Africans sometimes see African Americans in ways that white Americans see Black people' (Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019, p. 25)[1]. Here, the linchpin was ethnicity, where racist cultural representations of ADOS Black people seemed to be accepted by recently immigrated Black people.

**Intersectional Racialized Labor**. Questioning and critiquing images of Black women in media and popular culture along with stereotypes, perceptions/standards of beauty, and patriarchy was a core source of intersectional racialized labor, where students pushed back against harmful cultural representations (i.e., representational intersectionality). Intersectional racialized labor involving how to respond as a Black woman whose authority is questioned, e.g., experiencing the brunt of sexism and racism, illuminated structural intersectionality or the ways Black women tended to be positioned and overlooked in the institution. At the political level, Black women in AFAM

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[1]See Grier-Reed & Ajayi (2019) for a more complete rendition of this discussion in one AFAM meeting.

posed the question of who is a better ally, Black men or white women (Grier-Reed et al., 2020). In the process of resisting erasure, this question exemplified Black women laboring to capture the "complexities of oppression" (Harris & Patton, 2019, p. 350) that women of color face and the work of finding allies in political intersectionality: "One student said they've found other women of color (Asian) to be more understanding" (Grier-Reed et al., 2020, p. 17).

With respect to culture/ethnicity, racialized labor was nuanced for immigrant/recent immigrant students. This included living up to parents' expectations and managing intergenerational cultural conflict and tended toward experiences of structural intersectionality or gaps in resources. The following note summarizes the challenges raised in one AFAM meeting:

> Not disappointing parents and trying to get immigrant parents to understand challenges they face as students, helping parents understand and communicating with them. Cultural conflict, generational, cultural differences for immigrants.

Students seemed to need resources to help bridge their home lives and home cultures with college life and expectations.

Navigating structural intersectionality or tensions between school and community extended to ADOS Black students, where students expressed concerns about how education at their PWI separated them from rather than connected them to the communities from which they came and/or a collective identity. For example:

> Students discussed the nature of identity and how the university contributes or does not contribute to who you are. While one student described the student role as adding to her identity, other students discussed the university not making you what you are. Hanging on to who you are/were before coming here seemed to be important as students struggled with how to integrate the university into their sense of self.

It seemed clear that their identities, needs, cultures, and communities were marginal rather than central in the education they received at their PWI, and they labored to "hang on," minding the gaps.

This included "questioning the point of classes, particularly with respect to better understanding themselves and helping their communities" (Grier-Reed et al., 2020, p. 12). Furthermore, navigating the WRF often involved being the target of low expectations and being viewed as inferior (Grier-Reed et al., 2018), where students worked to resist or push back against these racist cultural representations. Additionally, intersectional racialized labor at the representational level played out through conflict between ADOS students and recently immigrated Black students. There was a disconnect between ADOS Black people and recently immigrated Black people that was filled with negative cultural representations and personal experiences. See below for an excerpt from one discussion.

> Students then talked about how they felt conflicted as Africans hearing about African American history. [Facilitator] asked how do African students relate and connect to African American history around slavery, Jim crow, etc. Students shared their experiences with African Americans. All of the students shared that they experienced bullying by African Americans as children growing up. There was more discussion about the divisions between Africans and African Americans.

Summaries of discussions that included racialized labor often included aspects of RBF as well. For example, across 91 meetings including racialized labor and 54 meetings including RBF, more than 20% of the time (or in 33 meetings) these two phenomena were coded in the same AFAM meeting. In fact, at times racialized labor seemed to result in RBF as indicated in the following meeting note, where "some suggested that it gets tiring to constantly have to stand up for oneself and one's race in

a society that is constantly disparaging you." Here, racial battle fatigue or exhaustion was a consequence of racialized labor or the work involved in resisting an oppressive system.

## Discussion

Across 277 discussion notes, we identified instances of racialized labor in 91 meetings; core sources of labor spanned the six categories of self-monitoring, flexing/adjusting, questioning/meaning-making, avoiding, affirming, and being the change at their institution. For example, students discussed working to be approachable, navigating stereotypes, codeswitching, self-policing, self-protection, and resistance. Students questioned how their Black identities conflicted with their education, and students took on *racialized equity labor* (Lerma et al., 2019), the work of making their institution more welcoming and equitable. Instances of racial battle fatigue (e.g., hypervigilance, frustration, anger, exhaustion, disappointment, shock, and feeling offended, pressured and guilty) were found in 54 meetings. The prevalence of these phenomena indicates the importance of AFAM as a space for working through, coping with, and/or making meaning of racialized phenomena in students' lives.

Across 24 meetings there were examples of intersectional racialized labor. Some of this intersectional racialized labor was representational as students spent several meetings unpacking cultural representations of Black women and its resulting harm. Moreover, in alignment with the literature, AFAM meeting notes alluded to challenges navigating existing structures. For example, Black women shared stories about being in a position of authority and not having their authority recognized (Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019). These women sought support as they labored to determine how to appropriately

assert themselves and their authority at the institution without being seen as the angry Black woman (Arnold et al., 2016; Corbin et al., 2018; Haynes, 2019). AFAM was a resource helping to fill in the institutional gaps in these spaces of structural intersectionality, where students also questioned how to use their education to help their communities and how to bridge college life with home cultures.

Intersectional racialized labor that was political included getting involved, building allies, and standing up for justice (Grier-Reed et al., 2020). This encompassed challenging and resisting erasure from feminist and anti-racist discourses, where feminist discourse has centered white women and anti-racist discourse has centered Black men leaving Black women at the margins of both (Collective, 1982; Harris & Patton, 2019). In AFAM, students questioned who the best allies for Black women were, given these realities, and discussed the importance of allying with other women of color—a kind of political intersectional racialized labor (Grier-Reed et al., 2020).

Simultaneously navigating anti-Black racism, islamphobia, and xenophobia, e.g., being "Black and alien for speaking a different language and wearing a hijab" or "Black but" when students were viewed favorably as new immigrants and/or encouraged to disidentify with ADOS, added another layer of intersectional racialized labor focused on harmful cultural representations. George Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015) have drawn attention to the complexities of being "*Black within Black*" (p. 17) including the experience of foreign-status, where newly immigrated Black students face additional and unique cultural adjustments. We found some evidence of this in AFAM discussions as students tried to navigate and manage cultural expectations of immigrant parents which sometimes included negative representations of ADOS. In fact, intersectional

RBF in our study included the seeming acceptance of racist stereotypes of ADOS by more recently immigrated Black people. Navigating these tensions was a source of labor. At times students noted being bullied by and feeling disconnected from the history of ADOS peoples in the U.S.

AFAM students seemed to use the group to address structural gaps in support. For example, when discussing intersectional RBF related to being disregarded as a woman of color, students primarily used the group to facilitate the racialized labor involved in navigating their environment. In other words, AFAM students seemed to spend more time talking about how to navigate whiteness (i.e., racialized labor) than they did discussing the emotional consequences of this labor (i.e., RBF). Case in point: there were 91 meetings including racialized labor and only 54 meetings including RBF.

Secondarily operating as a sanctuary for RBF, AFAM appears to be a space primarily supporting students' racialized labor. Racialized labor for AFAM students included questioning the assimilative nature of education while working to be approachable. Navigating the WRF at their PWI including stereotypes about Black people at times called on students to avoid, at times called on them to resist, and at times called on them to codeswitch. Given these complexities, one of the primary benefits of AFAM seemed to be providing opportunities for building interpretive, meaning-making capacities that helped students negotiate the racialized labor in their lives. In fact, relating personal experiences as they critically analyze structural and interpersonal injustice may aid in reflective coping and personal coherence for students, where reflective coping is associated with positive mental health outcomes, especially when compared to suppressing emotions or emotional reactivity (Heppner et al., 1995;

Szymanski, 2012; Wei, Heppner, Ku, & Liao, 2010). This may be one way AFAM operates as a therapeutic counterspace (Grier-Reed, 2013; Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019).

**Implications**

Our study of racialized labor has broad implications for researchers and practitioners. We not only introduce the concept of *racialized labor in everyday life*, we also add precision and nuance by distinguishing the process of navigating oppression from potential psychoemotional outcomes. Moreover, we deepen understanding of racialized phenomena across the experiences of ADOS and recently immigrated Black people. Finally, our work has implications for promoting the wellbeing of Black students and for allyship in white spaces.

**Introducing Racialized Labor in Everyday Life**. Providing a conceptual lens for understanding the lived experiences of navigating oppression, particularly in the lives of Black college students, the phenomenon of *racialized labor in everyday life* encompasses and broadens the concept beyond just racialized equity labor or uncompensated labor addressing racism in institutions (Lerma et al., 2019). In our research, although *racialized equity labor* was part of the category, we called *being the change,* efforts at improving their institution was only one aspect of the racialized labor found in students' everyday lives. The bulk of the *racialized labor* in our study spanned the five categories of flexing/adjusting, self-monitoring, questioning, affirming, and avoiding, where at times students found it necessary to avoid rather than take on additional race-related stress and challenges.

**Distinguishing Process from Outcomes.** Focusing on the process or labor involved in navigating systemic oppression provides a unique vantage point enabling

researchers to separate the process from outcomes such as racial battle fatigue (RBF). In previous work RBF has been described as a cumulative social-psychophysiological response to racial micro- and macro-aggressions, including hypervigilance, social withdrawal, self-censorship, and questioning one's ability or worth (Corbin et al., 2018; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Jay, 2009; Smith et al., 2011). From our perspective, such broad-based conceptions of RBF can conflate the work of navigating whiteness (e.g., withdrawal, self-censorship, and questioning or what we call *racialized labor*) with the consequences of this labor. In contrast, the language or naming of *racialized labor in everyday life* provides a level of nuance and precision that can aid researchers, educators, and others in distinguishing the ongoing process of navigating racism from its negative consequences.

In fact, conceptually, racialized labor may fit neatly between racial micro- and macro-aggression events and the subsequent battle fatigue. Moreover, the conceptual umbrella of *racialized labor* can succinctly encapsulate a diverse array of ways Black students navigate white environments already captured in the literature, including feeling the need to prove oneself (Strayhorn, 2009). Naming what has gone largely unnamed, the concept of *racialized labor in everyday life* encapsulates experiences such as "*Onlyness*—the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space" (Harper et al., 2011, p. 190), and provides an analytical tool for distinguishing between strategic navigation and psychoemotional burden.

**Promoting Wellbeing.** Furthermore, framing the work of navigating whiteness as distinct from yet related to the negative psychoemotional burden or consequences of this labor can provide opportunity for exploring potential positive outcomes of racialized

labor; that is, using a strengths-based, growth-oriented approach to understanding racialized labor in the lives of students. For example, it is not clear from our research that racialized labor always results in RBF. Future studies should examine whether communal spaces, such as AFAM, in which Black people can come together and lay down their burdens or talk through problems facilitate racialized labor in ways that promote wellbeing, where wellbeing may include sense of belonging, communal wellness, and even posttraumatic growth (Tedischi & Calhoun, 2004) in the face of racial trauma.

This line of scholarship also has important implications for working in minoritized communities more generally, particularly for those interested in developing therapeutic counterspaces; where counterspaces are designed to counter white dominance and a WRF (Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Importantly, just getting People of Color together in a critical mass is not enough to create a therapeutic counterspace. For example, students often contrast their experiences in AFAM with experiences in the Black Student Union (BSU)—another counterspace on campus, where students complain about feeling unwelcome (at least at first for those who decide to continue to frequent the BSU).

The therapeutic value of AFAM is exemplified through the generation of traditional therapeutic factors such as universality, cohesion, catharsis, corrective emotional experiences, opportunities for vicarious learning, and social learning (Grier-Reed, 2013; Yalom, 2005). Moreover, students describe AFAM as a space of resilience that helps them get through the week (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). This is noteworthy given the academic toll of *racialized equity labor*. Lerma et al. (2019) describe student

activists as "drained of energy, time, and resources that could be devoted to other pursuits" (p. 16), where some have ended up on academic probation or suspended. Yet, participation in AFAM has been associated with positive retention and graduation outcomes despite the racialized equity labor we found in the current study (Grier-Reed et al., 2011; Grier-Reed et al., 2016).

**Advancing Nuanced Discussions of Black Experiences.** In addition, this study has implications for framing future research in ways that resist essentialist, monolithic approaches to understanding Black students. For example, George Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015) bring attention to complexities within Blackness for immigrant and recent immigrant students. Undoubtedly, the immigrant and recent immigrants in AFAM seemed to engage in racialized labor and this labor seemed nuanced at times by culture and ethnicity. Future studies that investigate these lived experiences are needed, including research that examines interactions between recent immigrant and ADOS Black students in the U.S.

Moreover, this research has direct implications for student affairs professionals creating spaces like AFAM that exist to respond to a need and that bring together ADOS, native born, and immigrant Black students. The current study along with previous AFAM research (Grier-Reed et al., 2018; 2019; 2020) suggest representational intersectionality may be a primary source of intersectional racialized labor and conflict, where ADOS and Black immigrant students stereotype each other or rely on harmful cultural representations that reproduce the WRF and contribute to intersectional RBF, e.g., the acceptance of racist attributions. Along with George Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015), we recommend future research to shed light on this dynamic. We also

recommend policies and practices in higher education that include gathering richer demographic data such as cultural and/or ethnic identity information rather than simply aggregating all Black students into one undifferentiated racial category.

**Allyship.** Ultimately, this line of research has implications for allyship in white spaces. For faculty in classrooms affirming and articulating institutional commitment to diversity and equity is not enough. They must take it upon themselves to recognize and lessen the burden of racialized labor on People of Color. The current research suggests that there is a toll racialized labor takes on college students (i.e., RBF). This conclusion is supported by Lerma et al. (2019) who identify the emotional drain of dealing with administrators, unsupportive peers, and communities in need. Grier-Reed et al. (2018) discuss the cognitive and emotional labor of explaining and educating others about racism, including the costs of standing up versus not standing up.

Given that the constant navigation of racialized experiences can contribute to RBF, faculty are needed who are capable of recognizing, acknowledging, and facilitating this racialized labor. Faculty who decide to take it upon themselves to stand up, explain, and educate others, can help to alleviate the burden. This may be especially important in racially charged discussions in the classroom, e.g., when white students claim "reverse racism" (as discussed by Grier-Reed et al., 2020, p. 14). In these instances, faculty must take on rather than eschew the roles of advocate, educator, moderator, ally, and even accomplice (Powell & Kelly, 2017). For more on the work of accomplices in social justice, particularly for white faculty see Powell and Kelly (2017).

**Limitations**

While the current study provides valuable insight into the phenomena of racialized labor and RBF, it is important to consider the limitations. First, there is the limitation of missing data. Although researchers were able to locate 277 AFAM notes, from 2005-2006 to 2017-2018 there were 354 AFAM meetings; hence, researchers were missing 22% of the meeting notes. Second, although AFAM facilitators were instructed to capture the content of network discussions each week, there was no uniform template or protocol used across the 13 years of archival data (with the exception of two semesters of the DAP format). In turn, there was variation in quality and detail across notes. Third, these notes represent secondary data rather than firsthand accounts of students' lived experiences. The value of the richness and detail often found in firsthand accounts of a lived experience cannot be overstated in phenomenological research.

The records analyzed in our study are not as accurate or as detailed as transcripts. At best, the facilitator notes provide a record of what facilitators perceived, saw, and heard during AFAM discussions and when condensed to written form are necessarily limited in scope and detail, providing a summation or slice of life. As it stands, the basis for the current research is students' experiences filtered through the lenses of the AFAM facilitators. Thus, the interpretive biases of AFAM facilitators is a significant limitation. Even so, from careful analysis of the compilation of these notes across a 13-year timespan, the rather nuanced phenomenon of racialized labor did emerge as separate and distinct from racial battle fatigue. Moreover, the phenomenon of racialized labor (and racial battle fatigue for that matter) did seem faithfully

represented in the data that we had. Furthermore, these phenomena resonated with the lived experience of our auditor and the lived experience of the former AFAM participants who engaged in member checking. Engaging additional students in member checking may have strengthened our interpretations.

In addition, the AFAM archives only included ethnicity data for 114 (14%) of the 790 participants. Until spring 2017, there was no systematic collection of ethnicity data. Consequently, for the vast majority of participants (86%) there are no records of ethnicity. Moreover, there is no systematic tracking of immigration status (e.g., first-generation, second-generation, etc.).

Finally, the current study is limited to notes summarizing discussions for students participating in a specific social networking group—AFAM. Issues of race and racialized labor may have been more salient for students who chose to participate in the networking group than for those who chose not to participate. Hence, future studies examining these phenomena across contexts and in different populations are needed to understand transferability.

## Conclusion

A potential theoretical missing link, the phenomenon of racialized labor illuminates the ongoing process of navigating whiteness and white spaces for People of Color. We captured the phenomenon of *racialized labor in everyday life* by listening to students' discussions in AFAM—a sanctuary for coping with racial microaggressions—for over a decade (Grier-Reed, 2010). We identified six broad categories of labor including self-monitoring, flexing/adjusting, questioning/meaning-making, affirming, avoiding, and being the change which included racialized equity labor. Our work on

racialized labor moves the conversation forward by naming the often-invisible process

of interpreting, questioning, critiquing, adjusting, code-switching, and responding that

occurs between the racial microaggression events, for example, and devastating

outcomes such as racial battle fatigue. We recommend future research that explores

how this concept may be nuanced for different groups, including ADOS, U.S. born, and

immigrant Black students as well as for other People of Color. Qualitative studies that

include thick description and individual level data can be enlightening, and research

based in constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) may be particularly well-suited

to better understanding how racialized labor is enacted in daily life.

We have little doubt that the toll of racialized labor can result in racial battle

fatigue, and we challenge researchers, educators, and others to explore mechanisms

that can ease the burden and lighten the load of *racialized labor in everyday life* for

People of Color. Research and intervention using strengths-oriented, assets-based

approaches may be particularly useful for uncovering avenues to facilitate the process

of racialized labor in ways that promote growth. Connecting cultural health to mental

health, this line of research can inform the much needed cultivation of spaces in

counseling and education that help people navigate their collective and individual

identities within (and outside of) a WRF while also integrating multi-faceted ethnic,

cultural, and gender identities into a coherent sense of self. This includes helping

people find support and resources for negotiating the racialized labor that is just part of

their daily life.

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