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### Vicarious racism: a qualitative analysis of experiences with secondhand racism in graduate education

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## Vicarious racism: a qualitative analysis of experiences with secondhand racism in graduate education

Kimberly A. Truong<sup>a\*</sup>, Samuel D. Museus<sup>b,†</sup> and Keon M. McGuire<sup>c</sup>

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In this article, the authors examine the role of vicarious racism in the experiences of doctoral students of color. The researchers conducted semi-structured individual interviews with 26 doctoral students who self-reported experiencing racism and racial trauma during their doctoral studies. The analysis generated four themes that detail the different ways in which doctoral students of color in the study experienced vicarious racism and the consequences of this secondhand racism. These themes are (a) observed racism, (b) trickledown racism, (c) normalization of racism, and (d) racial resistance. The article concludes with implications for future research and practice.

**Keywords:** vicarious racism; racism; higher education

Racial and ethnic inequalities are a persistent and pervasive aspect of society in general and higher education in particular (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012). For example, in postsecondary education, racial disparities in doctoral degree completion exist, with Asian American (50%) and Black (47%) doctoral students exhibiting 10-year doctoral degree attainment rates that are significantly lower than their White counterparts (55%) (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009). In addition, while Black, Latino, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native students comprised almost 31% of the national population in 2010 (US Census Bureau, 2012), they only constituted approximately 22% of all doctoral degrees conferred to US citizens and permanent residents (National Science Foundation, 2014). Despite some assertions that racism is not the cause of these inequalities (e.g. D'Souza, 1995, 1998), a plethora of evidence indicates that these disparities are indicators of systemic racism, which plays a major role in shaping the educational experiences and outcomes of people of color (Feagin, 1992; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Jones, 1997; Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

Due to the fact that racial and ethnic inequalities and racism continue to be persistent problems in society and higher education, addressing them should be of paramount importance to higher education researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. Indeed, it is critical that higher education scholars generate more holistic

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understandings of the ways that race and racism shape experiences and outcomes in higher education, and it is equally important that policymakers and practitioners make concerted efforts to combat racism (Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Solórzano, 1998). The current inquiry advances current levels of understanding regarding the ways that race and racism shape doctoral student of color experiences, more particularly their experiences with vicarious racism. For the purposes of the current investigation, we define *vicarious racism* as a person's indirect experiences with racism, resulting from racism targeted directly at one or more other persons in their environment (Harrell, 2000).

In the following sections, we provide the context for the current study. First, we discuss scholarship that underscores the endemic nature of racism in both American society and higher education. Second, we define and present the different types of racism that shape the experiences of people of color and, in doing so, we pay particular attention to the role of vicarious racism. These two sections ultimately serve as the basis of our conceptual framework. The remainder of this manuscript describes our inquiry into the ways in which vicarious racism shapes the experiences of doctoral students of color in graduate education.

### **Racism in education**

Racism can be defined as:

a system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial-group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of a group defined or perceived by dominant-group members as inferior, deviant, or undesirable; and occurring in circumstances where members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege by maintaining structures, ideology, values, and behavior that have the intent or effect of leaving non-dominant-group members relatively excluded from power, esteem, status, and/or equal access to societal resources. (Harrell, 2000, p. 43)

Many educational researchers have examined how racism shapes experiences within education (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Truong & Museus, 2012; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Some of these scholars have critically analyzed how educational policies and institutional practices function to contribute to the oppression of communities of color. For example, researchers have illuminated how ostensibly progressive legislation and policies, such as The Civil Rights Act (1964) and affirmative action, have failed to adequately redress racial inequalities, while there seems to have been an unanticipated deepening of racial inequities in the criminal justice and educational systems (Alexander, 2010). Other scholars have highlighted their own experiences with race and racism within the academy (Griffin, Ward, & Phillips, 2014; Rollock, 2011).

In addition, scholars have begun to uncover the ways in which racism permeates postsecondary educational institutions (Griffin et al., 2014; Museus et al., 2012; Solórzano et al., 2000; Truong & Museus, 2012; Yosso et al., 2009). For example, Solórzano et al. utilized qualitative methods to analyze the experiences of African American and Latino undergraduates and found that they regularly experienced hostile racial climates and racial prejudice and discrimination. Moreover, the findings of these studies are consistent with a large and growing body of literature that highlights the racialized experiences of undergraduates of color (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Feagin, 1992; Feagin et al., 1996; Harper & Hurtado,

2007; Hurtado, 1992; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Museus & Truong, 2009; Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

For example, Harper and Hurtado (2007) conducted a comprehensive literature review of the previous 15 years of research on campus racial climate. All but one of the empirical studies they found on campus racial climate focused on undergraduate students. They found that research on campus climate focused on the following three areas: students' differential accounts of campus racial climates by race, students of color reports of prejudice and racism on campuses, and benefits of cross-racial interactions. The researchers also conducted a qualitative study on campus climate at five large, predominantly White institutions across the country. Harper and Hurtado convened focus groups with 278 Asian American, Black, Latino, Native American, and White students. They presented nine themes from their analysis of the focus group data: (1) lack of institutional commitment on diversity issues; (2) race was a taboo topic to discuss; (3) students self-segregated themselves based on race; (4) different levels of satisfaction with college experience based on race; (5) institutions had poor reputations for how they dealt with racism and diversity issues; (6) White students' overestimation of minority students' satisfaction with their college experiences and institution; (7) lack of diversity in most curricula, activities, and spaces on campus; (8) minority administrators' awareness of racial inequalities on campus, but lack of action for fear of losing their jobs; and (9) institutions had never used their own research capacity to conduct campus racial climate assessments on their campuses.

There is also a small and growing body of literature that focuses on the racialized experiences of graduate students of color in particular (Gay, 2004; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Solem, Lee, & Schlemper, 2009; Solórzano, 1998; Truong & Museus, 2012). This body of research has begun to shed light on the ways in which many graduate students of color experience types of racism similar to their undergraduate counterparts, including underrepresentation in graduate programs, cultural mismatch between the worldviews of students of color and those represented in the curricula, stereotypes of their intellectual inferiority, lack of access to faculty mentors who share their ethnic backgrounds, and limited engagement from faculty mentors in meaningful and substantive intellectual activities. Gay (2004) described the process of marginalization by which there is an absence of "goodness-of-fit issues between the needs, interests and skills of students of color, and institutional priorities and protocols" (p. 267). Such material dissonance creates an environment where students of color feel like "Guests in Someone Else's House" (Turner, 1994). Solórzano (1998) conducted a qualitative study with 22 Chicana and 44 Chicano Ford Foundation Minority Scholars about their experiences with race and gender microaggressions. He found that such out-of-placeness and low faculty expectations were not simply due to graduate students' ethnicities, but were further compounded by their gender, class, and language statuses. One participant in his study shared how being a woman in a male-dominated field further led to her intellectual isolation as male colleagues objectified her presence. Finally, Solem et al. (2009) examined departmental climate and graduate students' experiences in geography programs. They conducted focus group interviews with 28 participants and surveyed 605 graduate students. Responses from their survey showed that students of color felt isolated and perceived their departments to be "less tolerant, equitable, and diverse" compared to Whites (p. 281). Students of color were also more likely than White students to report that their department was not collegial and should be more supportive of efforts to enhance the structural diversity within their departments by increasing the number of students, faculty, and administrators of color.

Multiple studies shed light on the psychological consequences and responses that result from encounters with racism among doctoral students of color. Gildersleeve et al. (2011) examined the experiences of 22 Black and Latino doctoral students at three different institutions. In their study, racism led to students of color self-censoring, accumulating self-doubt, and feeling forced to create supportive peer networks to help negotiate their racist experiences. Truong and Museus (2012) conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 participants who experienced racism and racial trauma in doctoral study. They presented a taxonomy of how doctoral students of color cope and respond to racism in their programs. Participants reported using a variety of approaches to maintain their well-being and negotiate relationships within their programs, such as utilizing support networks, avoiding racist environments, transferring out of their programs, seeking interventions, and documenting and filing complaints.

While the aforementioned studies are important, none of them focus explicitly on analyzing the ways in which vicarious racism shapes doctoral experiences. As such, our present study seeks to extend these previous investigations by specifically examining secondhand racism in the experiences of doctoral students of color. In the next section, we operationalize and discuss evidence of the existence of vicarious racism to contextualize the current examination.

### **Vicarious racism**

Research also indicates that people of color experience racism either indirectly or vicariously via other people in their environment. Building on previous scholarship (Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2006; Browne Graves, 1999; Harrell, 2000; Dominguez, Dunkel-Schetter, Glynn, Hobel, & Sandman, 2008; Nuru-Jeter et al., 2009), we use *vicarious racism* and *secondhand racism* synonymously to refer to cases in which people of color indirectly experience racism that is targeted at other persons of color in their environment. People of color can experience racism vicariously via the encounters of family members, friends, community members, or strangers. When individuals experience secondhand racism, they can come to the realization that they are also vulnerable to the racism that they have vicariously experienced, and they can encounter harmful emotional, psychological, or physiological consequences as a result of these experiences. One outcome of the current analysis is the illumination of the types of vicarious racism experienced by students of color in doctoral education and ways that they cope with this secondhand racism.

Harrell (2000) stated that one of the six ways people of color experience racism-related stress is through vicarious racism experiences. Harrell argued that it is imperative for individuals to understand vicarious racism as it is one way that racism manifests itself. Vicariously experiencing racism through observing or learning about how family members and friends experience racist acts can also directly affect individual psychological and emotional well being. In addition, people may also suffer from observing racism that strangers experience.

Several scholars have conducted studies of race and racism and underscored instances in which people of color observe or learn about other people's racist encounters (e.g. Du Bois, 1903; Essed, 1991; Feagin et al., 1996; Tatum, 1987), but few studies focus on systematically analyzing such vicarious racism. An extensive review of literature reveals only four studies that specifically focus on examining secondhand racism (Alvarez et al., 2006; Dominguez et al., 2008; Jackson, Phillips, Hogue, & Curry-Owens, 2001; Nuru-Jeter et al., 2009). These inquiries reveal a few

important realities about the nature and effects of secondhand racism. First and foremost, there is some indication that many students of color might indeed experience vicarious forms of racism. For example, Alvarez et al. (2006) quantitatively analyzed the experiences of 254 Asian American participants with racism, and reported that secondhand racism was the most common form of racism among this sample. In fact, 99% of participants in this inquiry reported at least one experience with vicarious racism in the five years prior to the study, while 90% of the students experienced racism directed at them.

Second, existing evidence suggests that vicarious racism might be a stressor. Indeed, multiple examinations reveal that African American women report that the secondhand racism that they experienced was a stressor (Dominguez et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2001; Nuru-Jeter et al., 2009). These inquiries indicate that, as children, African American women often observe racist incidents or their parents tell them about their experiences with racism (Dominguez et al., 2008). These studies also suggest that African American mothers report severe stress as a result of observing their children experience racism and thinking about how their children would experience racism in the future (Nuru-Jeter et al., 2009).

Third, research on policing indicates that people of color who experience vicarious racism seek support and, in doing so, can exacerbate the negative effects of this secondhand racism (Brunson, 2007; Glover, 2009; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). This scholarship shows that Latino and Black individuals hold more negative perceptions of police than their White counterparts, negative vicarious racism-related experiences with police might be stressors that increase mistrust in law enforcement, and individuals who encounter racism-related police misconduct will often turn to their family and friends for support. When individuals tell their friends, family, neighbors, and others about their experiences of racism, it can create a “domino effect of anger and anguish rippling across the extended group” (Feagin & Sikes, 1994, p. 16). Put another way, there is evidence that individuals who seek support to cope with racist encounters can expose others to secondhand experiences that result in racism-related stress and trauma. However, this process has not been the focus of systematic empirical inquiry.

It is important to note two important limitations of this body of knowledge on vicarious racism. First, as mentioned above, only a few empirical inquiries focus on examining the nature and effects of secondhand racism (Alvarez et al., 2006; Dominguez et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2001; Nuru-Jeter et al., 2009). As a result of the paucity of scholarship that systematically analyzes vicarious racism, this phenomenon is not well understood in general. Moreover, our review uncovered only one systematic analysis of secondhand racism among undergraduate students (Alvarez et al., 2006) and no empirical examinations of this phenomenon among students in graduate education. Consequently, little is known about how vicarious racism shapes the experiences of students of color in postsecondary education.

Second, many researchers who do mention vicarious racism in their work do not disaggregate it from other types of racism (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Renae Stancil, Hertz-Picciotto, Schramm, & Watt-Morse, 2000; Seaton, 2003; Utsey, Payne, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996). For example, in several existing inquiries, researchers analyze individual, institutional, and cultural racism and offer accounts of how people of color experience each of these forms of racism both directly and vicariously (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Seaton, 2003; Utsey et al., 2002; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996). Such analyses make it difficult to separate



the nature and effects of direct racism from those of secondhand racism and gain an in-depth understanding of the latter (Harrell, 2000).

Due to the paucity of existing literature on vicarious racism in higher education and the aforementioned complexities in studying this phenomenon, more systematic empirical inquiries of both undergraduate and graduate students' experiences with secondhand racism are warranted. The current investigation is aimed at offering such an analysis, as this phenomenon has been understudied in education and has never been applied to students in doctoral education specifically. In the next section, we discuss the purpose of this study on secondhand racism and provide the context for the current inquiry.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the current study was to understand the lived experiences of doctoral students of color with vicarious racism. One overarching research question guided the inquiry: How does vicarious/secondhand racism shape the experiences of doctoral students of color? Three sub-questions also helped guide the analysis: (1) How do doctoral students of color experience vicarious/secondhand racism? (2) How do doctoral students of color cope with vicarious/secondhand racism? And (3) how do these students make sense of the role of vicarious/secondhand racism in their experiences?

This study contributes to the existing literature in at least two ways. First, the current examination adds to the small body of empirical literature on vicarious racism and its effects on people of color in general, thereby increasing current levels of understanding regarding how vicarious race and racism shape the experiences of people of color in American society. Second, the current inquiry is the first investigation to examine the role of vicarious racism in doctoral education and, therefore, adds to existing levels of knowledge of the racialized experiences of doctoral students of color in higher education. We specifically chose the doctoral student population as they have successfully navigated numerous years of schooling and may have had frequent experiences with racism and coping with these incidents (Cheng, 2003). As such, they may be in a position to better articulate the nuances of their racist encounters and how they cope and respond to racism (Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009; Cheng, 2003). In addition, because doctoral students of color tend to be the only one or one of a few students of color in their program, they often feel physically and intellectually isolated from others (Gay, 2004; Gildersleeve et al., 2011). We were interested in examining whether and how vicarious racism shapes their graduate experiences.

### **Methods**

We used qualitative research methods to conduct the current investigation. Qualitative techniques are ideal for generating rich descriptions and gaining in-depth understandings of existing phenomena (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002). Specifically, the phenomenological tradition examines the lived experiences of individuals as they relate to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, we deemed phenomenological methods ideal for this empirical inquiry because we sought to understand the lived experiences of our doctoral student of color participants with vicarious racism in their respective graduate programs. More



specifically, an empirical transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) was employed as it centralizes participants' insights, rather than researchers' interpretations as is typical in more hermeneutical approaches (Creswell, 2012). This is consistent with our belief that doctoral students of color are much more knowledgeable about their lived experiences than researchers and are critically engaged in making sense of those lived experiences.

### ***Participant selection***

As part of a larger study on the racialized experiences of doctoral students of color, we recruited participants by distributing a questionnaire widely over the Internet (i.e. via e-mail and Facebook). The larger study focused on how doctoral students of color experienced racism and racial trauma as well as how they negotiated the political complexities of racist encounters. While the larger study described different ways in which doctoral students of color experienced racism, the current analysis focuses specifically on their experiences with vicarious racism. Three hundred and sixty prospective participants completed the online questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of questions relating to prospective participants' race, year in their doctoral program, if they experienced racism in their programs, and if they experienced racial trauma while enrolled in their programs. Because recruitment efforts occurred via the Internet on various listservs, Facebook groups, and other types of online communications through email forwarding, it is unknown how many prospective participants received the online questionnaire. Of those who completed the questionnaire, a subset of individuals was invited to take part in the study based on three criteria. First, the students must have been enrolled in doctoral programs and have completed at least one year of course work in their respective programs or have graduated within the past three years. Second, participants must have self-identified as belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group (e.g. Asian American, Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander) and be American citizens or permanent residents. Third, to be eligible for participation, students must have agreed that they experienced racism and racial trauma during doctoral study.

We selected participants based on the criteria described above. We were not interested in whether participants attended public or private programs, those in urban, suburban, or rural areas, or even focusing on specific programs. Because this topic has been relatively unexplored, we wanted to include participants in the study who attended a diverse range of institutions.

### ***Description of participants***

The final sample consisted of 26 participants. Of those 26 participants, 20 were doctoral students of color and 6 were recent doctoral graduates of color. The sample included participants who had majored or were majoring in, anthropology biomedical science, biostatistics, business, communications, education, history, psychology, public health, sociology, social work and social welfare, and women's studies. Students enrolled in doctoral programs at the time of the interviews had completed between 1 and 6 years of doctoral study; the mean number of years completed was 3.15; self-reported grade point averages ranged from 3.3 to 4.0, with a mean of 3.7; and participants ranged in age from 26 to 63 years. Seventeen participants were women and nine were men. Three participants self-identified as Asian American,

and more specifically Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese American; 11 as African American or Black; 2 as Chicana; 4 as Mexican American; 5 as multiracial; and 1 as Native American.

At the time of the interviews, of the 26 participants, 10 were affiliated with private institutions and 16 were affiliated with public institutions. A total of 21 different institutions are represented in the sample. Based on Carnegie Classifications (2010), 18 of the 21 institutions were large in size, while 1 was small and 1 was medium size. A majority of the institutions were research universities, with 13 in the “very high research activity” and 4 in the “high research activity” categories (Carnegie Classifications, 2010). A total of 16 of these institutions were located in cities, 2 in rural areas, and 3 in suburbs and towns (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). They represented a wide range of geographic regions, including the east coast, west coast, northwest, southwest, Midwest, south central, southeast, Mid-Atlantic, and northeast.

### ***Data collection***

The primary source of data collected in this study was from semi-structured individual interviews with all 26 participants. We utilized a semi-structured approach because it allows a conversation to develop between the researcher and participants and engages the participants in a way that helped us better understand their experiences (Glesne, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of several topics related to the experiences of doctoral students of color, including participants’ academic aspirations and experiences, campus and departmental climate, personal experiences with racism, experiences with racism in doctoral study, and how racist encounters affected them. The interviews lasted between one and four hours each, but most were approximately two hours long. These interviews provided rich data regarding students’ experiences with racism in general and vicarious racism in particular in their programs. In addition, participants offered valuable insights into how they were able to respond to racist situations. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. We used the NVivo<sup>®</sup> Qualitative Software Research Package to organize, code, and analyze all interview transcripts.

### ***Data analysis***

Throughout the data analysis phase, we used methods suggested by Moustakas (1994). We read each of the 26 interview transcripts to gain a sense of what students’ narratives were conveying. We read the transcripts a second time and, following bracketing procedures prescribed by Ashworth (2010) and Moustakas (1994), reflected on our own experiences, assumptions, and biases as they applied to the data analysis so that we could capture the essence of the phenomenon of secondhand racism. Essentially, we isolated our experiences with vicarious racism in doctoral study from those of participants as we viewed the participants as experts in analyzing, making sense of, and articulating their own racialized experiences (Ashworth, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). During the third reading of each transcript, we constructed codes to highlight significant quotes and statements that participants made as they related to their lived experiences as doctoral students of color. We then organized these codes into thematic categories, which generated a deeper understanding of the essences of the phenomena. We drafted structural descriptions of *what* the doctoral

students of color experienced and textural descriptions of *how* the doctoral students experienced secondhand racism, as well as how they navigated through these racist encounters. The textual and structural descriptions, along with the thematic categories, guided the presentation of the findings.

### ***Trustworthiness and quality assurance***

We employed Lincoln and Guba's (1986) framework for ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of findings. We conducted member checks, convened a peer debriefing team, created an audit trail, and held follow-up interviews with participants. Member checks were conducted to confirm the accuracy of interview transcripts before the data analysis. In addition, we shared the analyses of participants' lived experiences with them and invited feedback. When data needed clarification or additional information, we conducted follow-up interviews. We convened a peer debriefing team consisting of people who study race issues and qualitative research methods to provide feedback on interpretations of the data. The seven members of the peer debriefing team were three faculty members, two doctoral students, and two educators interested in pursuing doctoral studies. These educators possessed master's degrees and had completed course work in qualitative methods and race.

### **Limitations**

This study has several important limitations, and we discuss three major interconnected limitations herein. Our sample was limited to domestic doctoral students of color, and we acknowledge that international doctoral students of color may have very different racialized experiences than those of US-born or naturalized doctoral students of color because they have not yet been socialized into the racialized context in which they currently live in the United States. A second limitation of the current study is selection bias. We interviewed doctoral students who self-identified as having experienced racism and racial trauma in graduate education and were willing to discuss their racialized experiences in higher education. However, there may be other doctoral students of color who did not receive or respond to the recruitment solicitations, but who could have shared different valuable insights into such experiences.

### **Role of the researchers**

It is important to consider the role of the researchers in all forms of inquiry, but particularly so in qualitative research in which the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument (Patton, 2002). In this study, our background knowledge of higher education, qualitative research, and race and racism in postsecondary education, as well as our personal experiences with racist encounters, informed the study. As former doctoral students of color who experienced racism vicariously, we believe that such racism might shape students' doctoral experience. As researchers who study race, we also believe that the voices of students of color are critical to understanding how race and racism function in society (Chon, 1995; Delgado, 1989). Thus, our collective professional and personal knowledge informed the design of the study, the interview protocol, the process of conducting interviews, analysis and

interpretation of the data, and presentation of the findings. In this way, our past experiences and positionalities served as resources rather than liabilities.

Although we believe that our insights about racism were useful in executing the study, we sought to represent students' experiences as authentically as possible. To this end, throughout the study, we maintained awareness of our own assumptions by bracketing our own experiences (Ashworth, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of bracketing was not to achieve some form of objectivity, but rather to prevent our own experiences from misrepresenting participants' voices. We believed that the participants were experts in navigating their own racialized experiences in education as they had successfully done so from the pre-/kindergarten through doctoral study. In this way, we were able to disclose our own personal experiences and perceptions of racism and trauma while employing the empirical transcendental phenomenological approach to the study.

## Findings

Our data analysis revealed four thematic categories that describe how vicarious racism shaped the experiences of our participants in their doctoral programs. The first two themes describe two different types of secondhand racism experienced by participants, while the remaining two themes illuminate participants' coping responses to the vicarious racism that they experienced. First, *observed racism* refers to instances in which participants experienced vicarious racism by hearing stories about or seeing racism directed at faculty and peers, which invoked negative emotional and psychological reactions from participants. Second, *trickledown racism* refers to cases in which participants were structurally affected by racism directed at their faculty mentors of color and which resulted in negative consequences for participants (e.g. the departure of a faculty advisor and the diminution of support for these doctoral students). Observed and trickle-down racism sometimes occurred simultaneously, as participants observed racism targeted at others and experienced the structural trickle-down effects of it. Third, the *normalization of racism* describes the process by which learning about secondhand racism led doctoral students to the realization that racism is a normal aspect of their graduate education programs. Finally, *racial resistance* refers to cases in which vicarious racism resulted in participants' collective mobilization to combat racism. The themes were presented in this way as the literature review informed us that vicarious racism manifests in complex ways, both as a stressor as well as a way of coping with racism (Alvarez et al., 2006; Browne Graves, 1999; Brunson, 2007; Dominguez et al., 2008; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Glover, 2009; Harrell, 2000; Jackson et al., 2001; Nuru-Jeter et al., 2009; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). We wanted to capture the process by which vicarious racism functions from one end of this spectrum to the other while also demonstrating how this occurs within doctoral programs. Before moving forward, it is important to note that only two participants did not experience secondhand racism, which could be a result of the fact that they were the lone students of color in their doctoral programs.

### *Observed racism*

All of the participants who reported experiencing vicarious racism in the current study observed racism. This occurred when students visually witnessed racist acts directed at people of color in their network or learned about such racism via

storytelling. Participants in the current study discussed observing racism experienced by peers and faculty of color in their graduate programs, and this theme consisted of two elements. First, participants discussed their *visual observations* of their peers and faculty members' experiences with racism. Second, these participants also discussed *hearing stories* of racism experienced by their peers and faculty of color in their respective doctoral programs.

Indeed, several participants discussed visually observing peers and faculty of color experience racism directly. For example, in the following remarks, an African American male participant recounted witnessing an exchange between the chair of his department and the only Black faculty member in his department when he began his doctoral program:

My first time meeting him, he and the Chair of the doctoral program got in a shouting match in a class. And, she pretty much just said he was an "idiot" and his research was "worthless" even though he has more publications than anybody in the department and had written several books.

Bearing witness to the faculty member of color experiencing such degrading and dehumanizing insults on his intelligence communicated to doctoral students that faculty were not immune to racism despite having attained a place in the professoriate. The participant discussed how he had conversations with the Black professor and has observed the daily struggles he had within the hostile department:

It's really tragic. He's someone that should be celebrated for his accomplishments and he's really kind of pushed to the background. I had a conversation about that at a conference and he acknowledges his experience is just horrible there. But he's invested so much time and energy there he feels like he's got to stick it out and he's kind of sticking it out and pushing them to hire more people of color so that the environment is not as hostile for students of color. He's trying to hang in there and do his part. But I don't know how long he's going to last there.

In addition to visually observing racist encounters, participants discussed observing racism in their doctoral programs via other people's stories. A multiracial participant, for example, described hearing a story about how the Chair of her department degraded a Native American student in public when this student expressed her concerns about the racial and cultural bias in the curriculum:

[She] went in and talked to the Chair and talked to her about the curriculum and she ended up getting yelled at by our Chair in such a manner in front of people that she cried. When we spoke, she said it was one of the most humiliating experiences ... that the Chair literally got up out of her chair and started yelling at her. The student was very upset and she didn't know if she was going to stay in the program or not ... The Chair is very aggressive towards women of color ...

Another multiracial student described hearing the struggles of an Asian American faculty member, who refused to conform to her White colleagues' paternalistic and "exoticized" expectations of her to be "docile":

She was very well respected in her field, had made quite a name for herself, and she was very accomplished. She was tenured faculty. The way I understand it is directly from being in relationship with her, when they hired her they made some assumptions. They exoticized her; kind of fetishized her body and they exoticized her and thought that she was kind of this docile Asian woman. It fit very neatly into the ways in which the White males at that time wanted to paternalize the dynamics. It turned out that she was this fiercely strong and bold and brilliant woman who had a voice and had agency. That was very disappointing, as the story goes; I wasn't there. But as the story goes

that was very disappointing to the faculty, the White male faculty in the department. As a result, there was some tension here and there between opposing worldviews and opposing politics.

Ultimately, the participant shared that the Asian American faculty member left her program because her spirit was broken from dealing with racism in her department. The participant stated about her advisor:

She started to look elsewhere for where her services would be valued. She's one of the top scholars internationally in our field. They lost her and we lost her and I lost an advisor and somebody that I really looked up to and really loved.

The circulation of these narratives reinforced the potential negative consequences if students of color push back against institutionalized racism and discouraged them from engaging in such resistance.

An Asian American participant described how she heard about how a peer of color in another department had similar experiences to her in that their funding had been taken away. The participant's peer entered the program with guaranteed tuition costs and a stipend for three years, but after she enrolled, her funding was retracted and she was told she had to find her own financial support. After this student of color was able to acquire a prestigious pre-doctoral fellowship for minority students from the National Institutes of Health, however, the former advisor suddenly took special interest in her:

The advisor was promoting her in front of other colleagues when in fact the advisor in the beginning actually threw her on her own and said, "You have to fend for yourself." The advisor actually did not give her any support as to how you even go about writing a [fellowship funding proposal] or how you would even support yourself. So, basically, because this doctoral student was so successful in getting a peer reviewed funded fellowship, the advisor actually turned around and took credit for her success and basically showed interest now, a vested interest now in her development as a graduate student. For me, it felt maybe not very genuine or not very sincere and sort of exploiting her and her situation at the same time ... doctoral students of color when they get a prestigious fellowship like that and having their advisor who is from the majority culture automatically taking credit for their achievements without mentoring them or guiding them along the way ...

Beyond observing racism through storytelling as it relates to out-of-classroom experiences, one participant shared how they learned of in-classroom racist experiences colleagues of color encountered. For example, a Chicana doctoral student shared how she was told a story of a student making a comment in class referring to Latino students as "illegal aliens." Beyond the statement in and of itself being troubling, the professor's silence reinforced the student's sense of isolation. The same student shared a story of a racist experience her friend shared with her:

... she was packing up her things to leave for home after one of the classes had ended [and] her professor told her that she was not to ever speak Spanish in his class again. She turned around and said class is over. I was just speaking to [my friend] about what we were going to do after class to study together. The professor said I don't care what you were talking about or for what. In my class you're not to speak Spanish again.

Although these students went to school in a state where Spanish was an officially recognized language, the professor did not allow students to speak Spanish in the classroom. What is further striking about such policing of language is that it extended beyond formal conversation during class. Faculty pedagogies of silence and silencing, respectively, rendered the classroom an already unsafe space.

These quotations illuminate how participants were exposed to stories about their peers and faculty of color encountering and navigating racism within their graduate programs. These vicarious experiences with racism had negative emotional and psychological effects on participants, such as inducing frustration and anger.

### **Trickledown racism**

We use trickledown racism to refer to cases in which participants reported that racism directed at faculty members of color structurally limited their opportunities and negatively affected their experiences in graduate school. Trickledown racism is distinct from observed racism. While observed racism primarily affected participants via its negative emotional and psychological consequences, trickledown racism impacted participants by limiting the levels of support in their environment. Trickledown racism manifested in two key ways. First, participants discussed how the racism that their faculty of color experienced resulted in *decreased mentoring and support* for them. Second, participants discussed how racism directed at faculty led to the *complete eradication of mentoring and support* through faculty mentors' departure. In some cases, participants felt that they experienced racism directly as a result of their advisors leaving their institutions. This theme explains how racism that is targeted at people in the environment of doctoral students of color can not only lead to these students observing racism and suffering psychological consequences from these observations, but can also shape the conditions that they must navigate (e.g. availability of support structures) as they advance in their programs.

Regarding the first type of trickledown racism, participants discussed how they experienced decreased mentoring and support because their advisors of color were so busy investing their energy in navigating the racism within their departments. For instance, one Black male participant discussed how the racism directed at his advisor led to a reduced level of support to develop his research skills and agenda. This student expressed the following:

My friend and I really don't get an opportunity to publish in our doctoral programs. I would argue that it is because of many of the things that [my advisor] experienced as an African American male faculty member. He has to deal with the racism in his life, the racism in higher education, and the constant racist issues that affect the department that he teaches in. As a result of the things he deals with, he often times doesn't have time to interface with his advisees.

The student had mentioned one racist incident his advisor experienced related to tenure. He was recruited from another institution and hired because of his exemplary scholarship. He was the first African American male tenure-track faculty member hired in his department. While considering taking the position and early on after his arrival at the institution, he was assured that his research was exceptional and that his colleagues would support his early bid for tenure. However, his colleagues changed their minds:

My new advisor did not go up for tenure, and that situation was so racist. At first, he was told from his colleagues that they would stand with him, but they later came back to say that he wasn't ready to go up for tenure ... At first, my former advisor [White female] told my new advisor that his scholarship was quality, and then she told him his scholarship wasn't quality. So, this confused him in some ways. He in turn, had to think about ways to interact with his advisees (i.e. me). The relationship he had with me somewhat suffered because he had to deal with her and the other faculty in our



department who discouraged him for going up for tenure, which is something every faculty member desires.

This quotation underscores how faculty mentors' preoccupation with combating the racism that they experienced indirectly translated into less time for faculty to spend mentoring and supporting participants, which was ultimately associated with decreased research skill development and reduced levels of doctoral socialization.

Participants also discussed how, in some cases, secondhand racism led to completely eradicating their access to their faculty mentors' support. Specifically, participants described how racism within their departments forced their faculty advisors to depart from their institution. Once participants' advisors left their institutions, other faculty in their departments marginalized these doctoral student participants. For example, one multiracial female participant discussed how high levels of experienced racism led her advisor, an Asian American woman, to take a job at another institution. This participant's faculty advisor was the only person in her program that she fully trusted, and this faculty mentor's departure meant that the participant had to learn to navigate the racism within her department while members of the department subsequently targeted her for dismissal. As this participant described her experiences after her faculty mentor's departure, she discussed how the Chair of her department treated her in the classroom in the following remarks:

In this class I learned not to really do certain things. I didn't want him to see me. I tried to be invisible so that I could get through. He would do a lot of things to encourage me to quit ... He would try to convince me that I wasn't good enough to be in this program and that I should quit the class. We would have these interactions frequently where he would say things like, "You know you can quit. You can always come back some other time if it's too much for you to handle."

Similarly, another multiracial participant discussed how her advisor protected her from having to experience the hostile departmental climate, but ultimately left her institution. After her advisor's departure, faculty targeted the student directly by taking away her funding, calling her home to insist she quit doctoral studies, and refusing to serve as her advisor. She described how, since her advisor left, the faculty tormented her to the point where she experienced racial trauma:

I went from having a very healthy experience when my advisor was there to ending up with symptoms like insomnia, high blood pressure, weight gain, back problems, headaches and I think probably for me the worst one is I never used to get panic attacks or anxiety attacks. I get anxiety attacks and panic attacks now.

As this quotation illustrates, sometimes the racism that participants experienced after their faculty mentor's departure led to severe negative consequences. Indeed, this participant reported that her experienced racism in her doctoral program led to her being diagnosed with severe depression. She became protected under the [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#), but her department's chair continued to treat her inappropriately by calling her home to tell her to quit the program, yelling at her in meetings, telling other faculty not to serve on her committee, and filing a false complaint about her to the unemployment office.

### *Normalization of racism*

Vicarious racism also led to the normalization of racism among participants. The normalization of racism refers to the process by which participants came to the

realization that racism is a normal and pervasive aspect of their doctoral education. First, the doctoral students of color reported noticing *patterns of racism* throughout their academic departments. Second, participants discussed how they went through the process of *externalization* in which these observations of patterns of racism led to increasing realizations that the source of their racial problems was not themselves, but was instead the normal and pervasive nature of racism that permeated their graduate school environments. This theme illuminates one critical response to secondhand racism among doctoral students of color – a process through which doctoral students make sense of the vicarious racism that they experienced, learn that racism permeates their environment, and develop a foundation for dealing with it.

Regarding the first element of the normalization theme, participants discussed how they interacted with their peers of color to share stories of racial isolation, devaluing research focused on race, racial microaggressions, and differential treatment. Through this sharing process, participants were able to establish that their experiences were not unique encounters, but elements of larger patterns of systemic racism in their doctoral programs. One African American male participant illustrates this process in the following comments:

I think knowing about other people's experiences sort of gives you a context ... and lets you know it's more systemic than it is just you. So, it's bigger than you. So, at first I think I thought of things as my process was "What did I do wrong? What am I doing?" ... Then, once I started to see that there were other people going through the same thing it turned into "Oh, now I know that I don't have a problem." It's "What's going on with this institution? What's going on here?"

Participants expressed how knowing about other people's experiences led them to feel mistrust for those in power within their departments. They also described how, in some cases, learning about other people's experiences with racism contributed to increased anger, depression, severe racism-related stress, and despair. For example, one multiracial male participant expressed how secondhand racism and the realization that racism was a normal and pervasive aspect of graduate education induced several emotions, such as feelings of helplessness:

It pisses me off ... It's kind of sad because I just expect it now. So, I'll get an email and I'll write back like, "Yes. That happened to me too." Or, like, "Yes. Here's how you deal with this bullshit" ... It pisses me off that it's still happening. It shows me what to expect for the rest of my career in academia. It makes me sad that it's not really going to change any time soon. It makes me also sad that one thing that happens I think to graduate students is that there's so much pressure to establish yourself as an individual that collective strategies are frowned upon.

As participants went through the process of learning that their experiences were part of larger patterns of racism in their graduate programs, they also went through a process of externalization, by which they progressed from viewing their experienced racism as potentially their own fault to realizing that these racial realities stemmed from their external environment. Indeed, participants were often given messages that the racism that they experienced was their own fault and wondered whether they brought these experiences upon themselves. However, when participants experienced vicarious racism via faculty and students of color, they learned that it was their environment that imposed these racist experiences upon them and other people of color in their graduate programs as well. A Latino participant discussed how he vicariously experienced racist actions that helped him come to the realization that racism

was a more pervasive aspect of the academic environments that he navigated and that he was not the source of, nor responsible for causing, the race-related problems he observed:

When I hear of other students getting some of these comments and I see them getting upset, then I feel better. I feel like, "Okay, I am not just exaggerating here." For example, if I talked to them about some of these issues that I have experienced and they get upset, I feel a little bit better that I am not crazy.

Another Black student similarly remarked how she made sense of her own experiences based on finding out that at least two others had issues within her department and filed complaints. She stated, "That kind of helped reiterate the fact that I wasn't crazy, and I wasn't imagining crazy things happening, nor was I the cause, the one to blame for their actions." These participants highlight how students' experiences with vicarious racism led them to externalize the source of their racism-related challenges in graduate school.

### ***Racial resistance***

Finally, participants discussed engaging in racial resistance in response to the vicarious racism that they experienced through *constructing and utilizing support networks* and *collective peer advocacy*. This theme describes another critical response to vicarious racism among doctoral students of color and underscores how these students mobilized to cope with the vicarious racism within their doctoral programs. The theme highlights the importance of networks of collective advocacy and the agency held by students of color in doctoral programs.

Regarding the creation and utilization of support networks, secondhand racism led participants to develop communities of support, including founding student organizations and pairing up with peers of color to provide support for one another. One Chicana participant, for example, described how her advisor created a space for students to collectively discuss their racialized experiences. She stated that:

the space I think my advisor created also helped you cope, because here, not only can I bring in the frustration that I'm feeling but we can theorize it. We can talk about it. We can cope all together, strategize even, against it in some ways.

Similarly, other participants described how they participated in or started their own organizations to provide support networks for themselves and their peers. One Black participant described how Black students on her campus started organizing because they felt oppressed in their doctoral programs and their faculty and administrators did not pay attention to or address these issues. She stated the following:

One student was just having such a hard time with her boss and her lab mates, she would actually try to talk to her boss about what was happening to her and she was just really getting nowhere. And then one day after fighting with someone in her lab, she found a noose on her bench, and she took it to the graduate school, she took it to her boss. Nobody cared ...

Because this student and other students were not getting the support they needed in graduate school, this participant founded the Black Graduate Students Association at her institution. It became a counterspace where Black students could connect, discuss the issues they were experiencing, and provided support for each other.

These student groups also gave participants a vehicle to advocate for themselves and their peers. When they heard stories about racial injustice, many of them

organized to bring their concerns to the faculty and administrators at their institution. When the administration disbanded a Black male group, one Black male participant described how the group mobilized a town hall meeting to discuss their concern about the dissolution of the student group with the Vice President for Student Affairs. He was also a student representative on the Senate, so he spoke up about this issue during a Senate meeting where the faculty and administrators were present.

While being a member of a formal graduate student group made it easier to organize against racial injustice, some participants described how they appealed to their informal support network to advocate for peers. A Latina participant discussed how the faculty mishandled a situation involving one of her Asian international peers in the graduate school who had a difficult time adjusting to the doctoral program, had a breakdown, and attempted suicide. Instead of providing support for the Asian student, the faculty made the decision to dismiss her from the program. Granting leaves of absences to White students was an accepted practice in the program, and the Latina student was outraged that the department decided to kick the Asian international student out of the program instead of giving her an excused leave of absence. The Latina participant, along with her peers, brought up issues of fairness to the faculty and administrators. The faculty and administrators warned her about being labeled a troublemaker and risking being ostracized from the program:

That would not have happened if she was a White student ... I was outraged, and so I talked with other students of color who also knew her. We got together and we, as a group, kind of wrote a letter to the Director and to the Dean. We basically said we think this is injustice and as a group we did it. They did. We won, I guess, because they did agree to give her a leave of absence as opposed to kicking her out of the program. But it was an effort. It took a group effort to do that. Then later I was advised not to do that because I was the one that initiated it. So they saw me as the troublemaker. I was later advised by a different faculty that, you know you can't be doing those types of things. That's going to get you into trouble and you need to be, you need to shut up basically is what they were telling me. I did get talked to about it even though it worked out for her.

This participant's experiences illustrate how, in some cases, experiencing vicarious racism and subsequently advocating for their peers led to these participants becoming the direct target of racism within their doctoral programs.

## **Discussion**

At least six major conclusions can be drawn from the preceding analysis. First, our data suggest that secondhand racism does, in part, shape the experiences of doctoral students of color. While previous studies have underscored that people of color experience secondhand racism on a regular basis (Alvarez et al., 2006; Dominguez et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2001; Nuru-Jeter et al., 2009), none of these inquiries focused on experiences within graduate education and our examination adds to this literature by illustrating how vicarious racism shapes the experiences of doctoral students in higher education.

Second, the current findings suggest that experiences with racism vicariously, through visual observations and storytelling, might be important catalysts for people of color to develop more sophisticated understandings of the systemic nature of racism. Indeed, while many scholars have discussed the endemic nature of racism

(e.g. Bell, 1991–1992, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), our findings add to this existing literature by demonstrating that vicarious racism can contribute to doctoral students of color realizing that racism is not an individual problem, but is a systemic problem that permeates society and, in some cases, their graduate programs. Such realizations can allow doctoral students of color to better gauge their situations and figure out how to utilize coping strategies to effectively navigate them, such as constructing faculty and peer networks for support and to serve as a vehicle for advocacy.

Third, the findings indicate that, while seeking social support and collective advocacy can be critical tools for doctoral students of color to utilize in coping with racism, it might also lead to those students experiencing increased racism in their graduate education. Indeed, previous research provides some indication that seeking and constructing networks of support can lead to negative consequences, such as increased levels of racism-related stress (e.g. Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000). The current examination adds to this body of knowledge by showing how, when support networks are used as a tool for advocacy, they can lead to members of these networks becoming the direct targets of racism within higher education settings.

Fourth, the current inquiry reinforces and extends findings from previous studies on the racialized experiences of graduate students of color (Gay, 2004; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Solórzano, 1998; Truong & Museus, 2012). Specifically, our findings are consistent with how previous studies characterized student of color experiences in graduate programs, including the pervasiveness of racism, intellectual isolation, and circumvented faculty support as evidenced in access to mentorship and funding. However, our focus on vicarious racism contributes to this scholarship. For example, some studies (Gay, 2004; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Solórzano, 1998) have found that students experienced intellectual isolation as a result of faculty members guiding them away from particular research topics, low faculty expectations, and peers' unwillingness to engage them in substantive conversations around racism. Our findings extend that research by illuminating how doctoral students of color can also experience intellectual isolation as a result of racism directed at their faculty advisors. In this way, our findings demonstrate how isolation is relational and cumulative.

Lastly, our discussion of the normalization of racism and racial resistance supports Gildersleeve et al.'s (2011) finding that doctoral students of color encounters with racism may cause these students to collectively organize support and advocacy networks. Beyond giving students a stronger political voice, such groups provide students with an opportunity to depersonalize their racialized experience, gain a deeper understanding of how racism works in their department, and support one another through graduation. Yet, our findings complicate this ostensibly positive outcome by acknowledging how these very sources of support can potentially reproduce racial trauma in the retelling of stories.

### **Implications for research and practice**

The findings from the current investigation have several implications for research and practice. With regard to recommendations for research, scholars should make efforts to study the ways that vicarious racism shapes the lives of other people of

color in higher education, including undergraduates, faculty, and administrators of color. Indeed, with few exceptions (e.g. Alvarez et al., 2006), scholars have not systematically examined the ways that secondhand racism operates in postsecondary education contexts. For example, scholars may seek to understand how vicarious racism informs institutional recruitment efforts at the undergraduate and graduate level, by investigating how certain stories of students of color racialized experiences at a particular institution are circulated to potential applicants. While the current inquiry sheds light on this phenomenon in the context of doctoral education, more research is needed to understand how people experience vicarious racism in other spheres of higher education.

Second, scholars should make efforts to examine how the racial identity of doctoral students of color shapes their experiences with vicarious racism. Existing literature on coping with racism suggests that racial identity may play an important role in how people of color experience and respond to racism and racism-related stress (Brondolo et al., 2009; Stevenson, 2003). Therefore, a study that focuses on how vicarious racism interacts with racial identity to shape the experiences of doctoral students of color may be especially informative. This study would be particularly telling based on how students interpret vicarious racism, whether as a complex system that takes into account its role as a catalyst for racial resistance or as simply a stressor, and their coping strategies.

Our third recommendation for future scholarship is that researchers should examine whether and how vicarious racism influences the lives of White students. By common definitions (e.g. Jones, 1997), Whites cannot experience direct racism because they possess institutional power. Because there is no conclusive evidence from our research that Whites can or cannot experience secondhand racism, we recommend that this issue be examined further.

Regarding implications for institutional policy and practice, we strongly encourage institutions to consider the implementation of comprehensive anti-racism policies. Some colleges and universities have already adopted anti-racism policies that can both function to prohibit racist behavior on campus and promote the equitable resolution of racial conflict that manifests on their campuses. Policies of this nature are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for fostering positive and supportive environments for faculty and students of color. Indeed, our findings demonstrate that, when individuals experience racism on a college or university campus, such incidents can indirectly impact other members of the campus community through their experiencing that racism vicariously. Thus, we advocate for institutions to adopt anti-racism policies that go beyond the prohibition and resolution of racist behavior on an individual level (i.e. among those directly involved in the incident) to adopting anti-racism policies that prompt institutions to craft campus-wide racism-prevention initiatives and comprehensive responses to racist incidents on their campuses. To move in this direction, it is imperative that institutions first understand that racist incidents on their campuses contribute to larger hostile campus climates and can negatively affect many people in those environments.

In addition to adopting anti-racism policies, institutions of higher education should make intentional comprehensive and continuous efforts to create environments that discourage racism on their campuses and offer mechanisms for faculty and students of color to cope with the racism that they encounter within their institutional environments. While a discussion of all elements of such holistic and consistent institutional efforts is beyond the scope of this article, we provide a few

suggestions regarding actions that should be incorporated into such efforts. For example, institutions should provide formal, interdepartmental spaces for faculty of color and students of color to interact with and provide support for one another. Such interactions could occur over dinner or brown-bag lunches that focus on diversity issues in academia. As outlined in our *constructing and utilizing support networks* and *collective peer advocacy* findings, many participants discussed experiencing tremendous benefits through their involvement in these types of spaces and group interactions by utilizing them as critical sites for racial resistance, organizing and advocacy, and communal healing.

Our findings suggest that the participants in our study often took the initiative to create spaces that discourage racism and provide mechanisms of support to cope with the racism that they encountered. While this might not be surprising, it should not be assumed that faculty and students of color bear the primary responsibility for constructing such spaces. Rather, we assert herein that graduate schools and departments bear a responsibility to proactively support the formation of such spaces. For example, faculty members are often required to provide service to their departments by way of committee work. We suggest that departments and graduate schools also consider faculty members' involvement in groups such as those we recommend, too, as departmental service and provide funds for such efforts and include them in tenure consideration. Ultimately, such relationships between faculty and students of color could prove mutually beneficial, with each constituent group forming broader support networks to cope with, negotiate through, and strategize against racism. This would also benefit students and faculty members who do not have a critical mass of persons of color in their home departments.

Further, we recommend that the aforementioned groups are consulted regularly by administrative and faculty committees on ways to improve the educational environment as it relates to issues of racism. While doctoral students of color observed that encounters with racism were normal, it was uncommon for students to have direct and sustained access to institutional agents to whom they could direct their grievances. Rather than waiting for doctoral students of color to raise concerns about racism and racist learning environments, administrators and faculty should initiate engagement. From these interactions with students and faculty, institutional agents should implement and assess changes that would improve the campus culture. Further, we do not expect that including one student of color on one committee would yield the same results as compared to a group of individuals democratically organizing and identifying policies and practices that departments could implement to improve educational environments. Again, we emphasize this form of engagement should be consistent and proactive.

Lastly, we recommend that graduate schools partner with and employ institutions' counseling and psychological services (CAPS), which offer counseling services, psychological testing, workshops, and crisis intervention. CAPS counselors may work with students of color to provide them with support ranging from adjusting to graduate school to listening to their experiences with racism. They may also facilitate group therapy sessions. It is important for CAPS counselors to work with students through their issues as well as concentrate their attention on helping students to cope with institutional racism. When doctoral students of color make sense of their experiences along with their peers, they may feel helpless and hopeless. CAPS counselors should be aware that vicarious racism might cause some students



of color to further experience trauma and should help support them and guide them through the healing process.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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