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Imprecise Words: A Critical Discourse Analysis of institutional Statements Addressing Anti-Black Racism in 2020

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ABSTRACT

IMPRECISE WORDS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL STATEMENTS ADDRESSING ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN 2020

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Northern Illinois University, 2021
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A series of highly publicized off-campus acts of racial violence between February and September 2020 ignited a national reckoning on race, racism, anti-Black racism, and the role of higher education in systemic discrimination. In response, a number of college and university leaders published public statements attempting to address anti-Black racism both nationally and also on their respective campuses. The purpose of this study is to take a closer look at how colleges and universities in the University of Wisconsin System (UW-System) utilize public statements to address anti-Black racism. Utilizing Critical race theory as a theoretical framework, as well as Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation for data analysis, this study analyzed a total of 27 statements from 13 institutions. Findings explore what terms were utilized to describe the death of George Floyd (and potentially others who were murdered), who and/or what is at the center of the written statements, and what actions the institutions commit to taking in order to mitigate anti-Black racism in their campus communities. Finally, we conclude with implications for practice and a scholarly reflection.

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IMPRECISE WORDS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL
STATEMENTS ADDRESSING ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN 2020

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Katy Jaekel

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to a tribe called Daniels: Erica, Christian, Madison, Morgan, and Chloe. I

am who I am because you are who you are!

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

For decades, racial incidents have routinely occurred on college campuses (Cole & Harper, 2017). During the 2016-2017 academic year alone, the Anti-Defamation League documented 107 incidents of hate or bias on campuses (Bauer-Wolf, 2019). Additionally, 82% of the participants surveyed by the American Association for Access, Equity, and Diversity (AAAED) reported that they had encountered a hate crime while on campus (Bauer-Wolf, 2019). On a national level, campus police forces reported nearly 280 hate crimes to the Federal Bureau of Investigation between 2015 and 2017. Beginning with Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old unarmed Black man who was shot by three White men while jogging in a predominantly White area, followed by Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman who was fatally shot in her Louisville, Kentucky, apartment as she slept on March 13, 2020, after police officers attempted to serve a no-knock drug warrant. Taylor had no criminal record and no drugs were found in her apartment. Then, a queer Black man in New York City's Central Park asked a White woman to put her dog on a leash. When she refused, he began filming her on his cellular phone. In response, the woman called the local police and proceeded to frantically and fallaciously claim that an "African American" man was threatening her life. Later that month, a White Minneapolis police officer held his knee on George Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, killing the Black man in front of a crowd of traumatized citizens and millions of people across the world via social media. As the summer months came to a slow and painful sunset in August, Jacob Blake, a Black man, was shot seven times in the back by a White police officer while attempting to walk

to his car after allegedly breaking up a fight just moments before. Two weeks later in September, the Attorney General of Kentucky announced no officers would be charged in the death of Breonna Taylor. Each event resulted in protests, rallies, demonstrations, and other public forms of resistance across the country and in some parts of the world.

In response, a number of college and university leaders, including many presidents, published public statements about these racist acts and other racist incidents occurring within the US during this time. While some of the public statements were well received, others were largely viewed as performative acts. Sara Ahmed (2005) refers to a performative utterance within the context of speech as a statement that does what it says it does. Although public statements often admit to racism on campus, such admissions are not in and of themselves acts of anti-racism. Scholars observed that many of the statements released spoke out against racism and police brutality, but few explicitly mentioned Black people, directly referenced the Black Lives Matter movement, and/or committed the institution and its leaders to alleviate racism on campus and/or in the larger society (McKinzie, 2020).

For so many, the obscuring of Black bodies, Black people, and the Black Lives Matter movement specifically constituted yet another form of racism, specifically anti-Blackness. Here, anti-Blackness is understood as “the system of beliefs and practices that attack, erode, and limit the humanity of Black people” (Carruthers, 2018, p.7). This form of racism was also seen when few statements served to acknowledge the racism and discrimination endemic in their own institutions and few made explicit commitments to specific actions their institutions intended to take to support anti-racism (Bolumole, 2020). While is not uncommon for senior-level administrators to release statements about on-campus racial incidents after an institution receives widespread negative publicity (Cole & Harper 2017), but to my knowledge, there is a gap in the

research in how those statements actually serve to fracture and/or reify the larger discourse of anti-Blackness racism. While certainly racism has captured the nation's attention in recent months, and college and university leaders are more likely know to release public statements, it is critical that these statements be analyzed in ways to examine how their discourse may actually serve to further anti-Blackness.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2004) is to explore the ways in which colleges and universities in the University of Wisconsin System (UW-System) address nationally publicized incidents of anti-Black racism. Such incidents denote expressions, acts, and practices of anti-Black racism that capture national attention, often through the usage of mass media (Carruthers, 2018). It is critical that these statements be analyzed as language and how racists acts – when discussed – constitute speech acts that informs readers about institutional values. Moreover, although the term “incident” will be used throughout, readers are cautioned not to see these acts as merely *incidental* but rather uniquely situated within the historical context of race, racism, and anti-Black racism in American society.

As such, the guiding research question for this study is: How do institutional statements, responding to highly publicized acts of racism, address anti-Black racism in the US and on their campuses? Specifically, this study aims to identify and track how many statements were issued by the universities, who authored the statements, and how institutions discuss these racist acts. For example, this study aims to explore who wrote the statements, how the statements frame these racist incidents, and the language used to discuss racism and anti-Black racism.

Literature Review

This literature review will discuss research that explores how institutions respond to incidents of on-campus racism. A review of race and racism in higher education is prerequisite for developing a deeper level understanding of how institutions and their leaders respond to acts of anti-Black racism both on campus and in communities across the nation. Therefore, this literature review begins with a brief historical perspective of racial segregation in higher education, with particular attention paid to how racism affects campus climate for Black students. Followed by an exploration of institutional responses to on-campus racism, and concluding with an identification of gaps within the literature.

Racism in Higher Education

In their critical examination of higher education law, Alexander and Alexander (2017) describe American educational inequality when they assert the following: “The road from the first states’ abolition of slavery in 1777 to the Dred Scott decision, to the Civil War, to separate but equal, to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and ultimately to the diversity controversies of the new millennium covers a long and difficult path. (p.679). This quote summarizes the long and winding road towards educational equity and acknowledges just a few of the roadblocks, potholes, and gridlock-level traffic Black people in America have had to navigate through for centuries while traveling the road to freedom.

Higher education has always had what Perna and Kurban (2013) described as a college access problem. However, the issue of college access for Black people in America, as well as

other marginalized communities, did not start with higher education. Historical and contemporary societal forces such as the economic divide and housing discrimination result in a concentration of Black students in communities with scarce human and physical resources. Those who are able to enroll in postsecondary education are susceptible to racism inside and outside of the classroom, often resulting in lower levels of retention, persistence, completion, and overall student success. In short, issues of postsecondary access for Black students are not isolated. They can be attributed to institutional and societal forces such as redlining, housing discrimination, and poorly funded k-12 schools, among a myriad of other factors, leading up to a student experience that is largely affected by campus racial climate on Black students (Green & Trent, 2005; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2018).

Campus Climate

Generally speaking, campus climate refers to the environmental and psychological variables that work together to create a general community atmosphere and culture (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Campus racial climate encompasses students' observations of their experience as racial minorities on campus—everything from including their experiences with racism to the belief that the university is not taking enough specific action to address issues of diversity and inclusion. Identity referent climate describes the extent to which perceptions of climate can be shaped by individual identities as members of certain groups, specifically, how certain climates might be affecting students of color differently compared to White students. The intersection of race and climate is also a key element in student success outcomes for Black students as campus climates cannot only exist for some, but also be conceptualized as existing for *someone* (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003, p.271). This likely explains why students from marginalized communities, notably Black students tend to report more negative perceptions of

general campus, racial, and academic climate (Pfeifer & Schneider, 1974; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003).

Black students experience both covert and overt forms of racism. Consequently, Black students persist and complete at lower rates than their White counterparts (Brown, 2019; McClain & Perry, 2017; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2018; Thomas and Russell, 2019; Yoffe, 2017). Overtly, examples such as “Black” or “ghetto” theme parties sponsored by predominantly White fraternities and sororities are prevalent on campuses across the nation (Cole & Harper, 2017). Regarding relationships with police, Black students’ experiences mirror that of the larger population of Black people in the United States. Specifically, 34% of Black students feel somewhat or very anxious about police presence according to a study conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Thomas & Russell, 2019). Black male students are also more likely to be accused of sexual harassment or assault (Brown, 2019; McClain & Perry, 2017; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2018; Thomas & Russell, 2019; Yoffe, 2017). At Colgate University in the 2013–14 academic year, 4.2% of enrolled students were Black, yet Black male students were accused of 50% of the sexual violations reported to the university, and they made up 40% of the students formally adjudicated.

Covert forms of racism affect how Black students experience campus racial climate as well. Black students disproportionately experience racial microaggressions including both verbal and nonverbal assumptions and expectations by faculty members (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2018). Particularly, students across a number of studies have indicated feelings of diminishment from White professors who made assumptions about how Black students entered the university and wrongfully attributed their enrollment to affirmative action programs or racialized quota

systems (Brown, 2019; McClain & Perry, 2017; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2018; Thomas & Russell, 2019; Yoffe, 2017).

The stress associated with a racial campus climate can have profound effects on the recruitment, persistence, and completion of Black students. 70% of African-Americans who attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) did not complete their baccalaureate education, compared to the 20% of Black people who attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Brown, 2019; Davis et al., 2004; McClain & Perry, 2017; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2018; Thomas & Russell, 2019; Yoffe, 2017). Campus climates shape student experiences and outcomes. Moreover, Black students who experience negative campus racial climate are impacted by institutional communication and response to that racial climate as well. Continued attention to campus racial climate is necessary in order to create an ideal environment for students to encounter racial/ethnic differences, build awareness, and improve degree attainment and student success skills in a multicultural society (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012).

Institutional Responses to On Campus Racism

While campus leaders cannot realistically be held responsible for acts of racism that do not take place on their campuses, it is reasonable for leaders to be viewed as responsible for facilitating a response to nationally captivating occurrences impacting the campus climate. Additionally, college leaders should be aware that nationally publicized incidents of racism can potentially result in on-campus racial incidents and organized resistance efforts by students, faculty, and staff. For the purposes of this study, I rely on Davis and Harris's (2016) definition of institutional response as "statements released by those allegedly responsible for the racial incident" (p.63). There is no way to understate the importance of understanding these kinds of statements and how they can be used to set or revisit campus diversity and climate agendas

(Davis & Harris, 2016). Although Davis & Harris's definition focuses on acts of racism that take place on campus, it contextualizes the nature of responsibility that campus leaders should feel in response to highly publicized acts of anti-Black racism and the resulting on campus implications. Although not all the literature focuses on-campus racism, they each examine institutional responses to racialized occurrences. Key findings demonstrate three overarching themes: a restatement of institutional espoused values, directing students back to resources as opposed to commitment to action, and emphasizing White-centric ideology.

Restating Institutional Espoused Values

Hoffman and Mitchell (2016) conducted a discourse analysis of institutional responses to student activism and found that student leaders and activists expressed concerns regarding the institution's nonperformative commitments to diversity, including the practice of highlighting existing campus efforts. The authors assert that institutional leaders rely too much on current efforts and practices, much of which may already be missing the mark on supporting students of color. Mwangi, et.al (2019) studied the tone of 139 institutional responses to the rescission of the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The authors highlight the tone of the response and in their findings reveal that most statements were vague, brief, and neutral, oftentimes reflecting a failure to take a clear position (p. 259). Findings also showed a tendency for statements to express a commitment to the institution's mission and values, often including more vague and nondescript language of inclusivity and diversity. Davis & Harris (2015), who studied on-campus racism, found that institutional responses often give voice to administrators who are more concerned with restoring the image and reputation of the institution, rather than addressing or committing to repairing the harm done to students of color (Mwangi, et.al, 2016).

Centralizing Whiteness

Another theme was the presence of White-centric ideology and colorblindness within public statements addressing on-campus racism. Researchers reported that many reflected a desire to achieve a post racial society and rarely situated racial incidents within the larger context of systemic and institutional oppression – ultimately downplaying racism both on campus and abroad (Cole & Harper, 2017; Davis & Harris, 2015; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Mwangi, Latafat, Thampikutty, & Van, 2016). Statements addressing racism also tend to place the onus on all parties within the institution to further equity while failing to acknowledge the very real power differences that exist between racial ethnic groups in both employee and student communities (Cole & Harper, 2017; Davis & Harris, 2015; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Mwangi, Latafat, Thampikutty, & Van, 2016). This contributes to the centralization of Whiteness as people of color are often left to do the heavy lifting once the campus has moved on from the incident (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Several statements released by college presidents avoided mentioning the racial incident that took place on their campus and instead broadly referred to the acts as “campus concerns” (Cole & Harper, 2017). Similarly, Davis and Harris (2015) noted the tendency for statements to show hesitation around acknowledging the harm done and shifted the focus to intentions rather than impact. The practice of shaping, shifting, and refocusing narratives contributes to the centralization of White dominant ideology on college campuses. Moreover, statements that ignore the incident also contribute to the trauma cycle that Black people experience while processing through issues of race.

Directing Students to Campus Resources

Perhaps a less emergent theme was the practice of directing students to existing campus resources as opposed to an articulation of action. Garcia, et al. (2019) studied institutional responses to events challenging campus climate and found that many of the statements articulated the institution's stance on the situation or issue yet did not include specific action items beyond referring students to existing campus resources such as multicultural centers and counseling services. Additionally, the tendency to direct readers to existing documents regarding equity and diversity (i.e., institutional and departmental mission statements and strategic plans) as a demonstration of the institution's ongoing commitment to inclusion is a habitual communications practice among campus leaders (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). In other words, there appears to be a trend among institutional statements addressing racial injustice to direct students to read more statements addressing racial injustice.

Gaps in the Literature

The current body of literature primarily focuses on college responses to on-campus acts of racism and then promptly moves on to the theoretical framework section. Future scholars would benefit from a broader historical framing of race, racism, and anti-Black racism in higher education in studies like this one. The resulting implications are what Dillard (2000) referred to as an "endarkened" epistemology (see also Milner, 2007) as opposed to an enlightened one. The idea is that exposing the research community to the experiences and points of view of people and researchers of color will produce richer and more inclusive theories, perspectives, and positions (Milner, 2005; Dillard, 2000). In other words, epistemologies that are inclusive in nature tell the whole truth regarding race and racism in higher education. A brief but detailed historical framing would serve to endarken the literature and add to the perspective of future scholars, many of

whom arrive to their research having been severely mis-educated about the problem of race in America.

Theoretical Perspective

Among the great number of theoretical constructs that contribute to the existing body of academic scholarship on race and racism in education, critical race theory (CRT) sets a higher standard for developing a new common sense regarding race and racism in the United States (West, 1995). The goal of CRT is to make sense of how deeply ideological issues of race and power continue to matter in American society (Bell, 1980; West, 1995; Crenshaw, 1988;). Since its inception, CRT has boldly challenged the ways in which race, racism, and White supremacy are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole. As the goal of this study is to examine the discourse around anti-Black racism, the reliance on critical race theory as a theoretical framework is intentional.

Foundations of Critical Race theory

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced critical race theory as an ideological opposition to the centrality and complicity of law in upholding White supremacy. Additionally, CRT's focus on race in the American law system also serves to shed light on associated hierarchies in gender, class, and sexual orientation (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1988; West, 1995). The theory was introduced to the field of educational research by a community of progressive scholars of color in an attempt to advance research where issues of race were concerned. Scholars argued that race was undertheorized in education and the existing literature suffered from a lack of conceptual and analytic tools to discuss race, develop operational structures around it, and ultimately advance educational research examining critical issues related to race,

racism, and anti-Black racism in education (Bell, 1980; Cole & Harper, 2017; Milner, 2007; West, 1995; Crenshaw, 1988). Although the movement draws from traditional scholarship around civil rights, the literature continues to push back against traditional civil rights discourse, which refers to idealistic views about racial equality and social transformation resulting in a popular imagination of the civil rights movements of the late fifties and sixties (Bell, 1980; West, 1995; Williams Crenshaw, 1988). Rather, CRT engages in a discourse of civil rights reform, which stems from lived experiences of students and teachers in the American law school system. Critical race theorists such as Derrick A. Bell, Jr. Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, and Linda Greene (among others) seek to provide a set of tools for thinking about race that avoids the traps of racial thinking and serves as a useful critical compass for navigating the American higher education landscape.

CRT draws on three central tenets to explain how race and racism are so deeply rooted and embedded in our systems of knowing and experiencing: (a) the ingrained nature of race and racism; (b) the importance of narrative, counter-narrative, and centralizing stories told by people of color; and (c) the concept of interest convergence in education (Cole & Harper, 2017; Milner, 2007). First, race and racism are endemic, pervasive, widespread, and ingrained in society and thus in education (Milner, 2007). Their position is that the individuals who make up the educational community are socialized into a racial society; therefore, matters of practice and strategy are influenced by matters of race and racism (Milner, 2007). Second, CRT theorists argue that narrative and counter-narrative should be captured by the researcher, experienced by the research participants, and told by people of color (Milner, 2007). Finally, critical race theorists describe the third tenet, interest convergence, as an analytical construct that takes into account the motivating factors needed in order to eradicate racial discrimination or provide

remedies for racial injustice (Donner, 2005; Milner, 2007). The simple yet complex nature of CRT makes it one of the more thought-provoking theoretical frameworks in the field of educational research. Race and racism are social constructs that are often visualized to be too large to get over and too wide to get around but, CRT assists individuals with this thought pattern to bring race, racism, and anti-Black racism to scale, allowing for theoretical parameters around an otherwise boundless topic. CRT provides an appropriate lens for this study to address the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain dominant racial positions. CRT offers insights, pedagogies, and perspectives that shed light on how race and racism are endemic and present within written texts.

Research Design

This study utilized critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a methodological approach to explore the ways in which written texts can influence the shaping of narratives and the establishment and maintenance of power relations. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) offer an operational definition of CDA when they position it as a form of social practice that takes into account the context of language use to be essential to general discourse (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fairclough, 2006). Dating back to Fairclough's (2006) scholarship, an important body of theory speaks to CDA as a methodological approach to educational research. Fairclough (2006) later articulated perhaps a more contextual definition of CDA by framing it as an abstract mode of action—one that is socially fundamental and takes particular interest in the relationship between language, ideology, and power (Fairclough, 2006; Rogers, 2004). Additionally, discourse includes textual and contextual illustrations, depictions, and demonstrations of how things are, how things have been, and representations of how things should be (Fairclough, 2006).

In working to understand how policy and power fit together in creating change, Fairclough (1995), noted the significance of CDA from an equity lens, arguing that well-circulated texts have the power to divert attention away from the more complex issues of equity and justice. Additionally, a community of scholars agree that texts, policy documents, and other forms of widely received written communication have the potential to redefine current thinking and ultimately assist in the elevation and/or suppression of marginalized voices, struggles, philosophies, and agendas (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fairclough, 2006; Rogers, 2004).

Critical discourse analysis cannot be classified as a single method but is rather viewed as an approach; one that considers and pays particular attention to the variety of cultural and economic dimensions significant in the relationship between the use of language, social context, and power relations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This is a leading indicator for why critical discourse analysis is an appropriate methodology for this study. It makes clear that the use of language, particularly in widely circulated documents, have meaning and power.

Research Site

This study will survey statements released by institutions situated within the University of Wisconsin System. The University of Wisconsin System (also known as the UW System) educates approximately 170,000 students at 13 universities across 26 campuses; 2.8% of total system enrollment is African American, 6.2% Latinx, 1.8% Southeast Asian, 0.4% Native American, and 76.2% White. Similarly, African Americans make up 2.9% of all employees and 4.8% of administrators and academic leaders, while Whites make up 74.5% of total employees and 85.9% of administrators and academic leaders. This study reviewed all statements including extension campuses across institution type. Access to these statements through each institution's

website, with a second round of collection by way of contacting the front offices of the departments that released statements (i.e., the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, etc.).

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This study will rely on descriptive coding to analyze written statements addressing racism released by colleges in the UW-System. According to Miles et al. (2014), “A descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase—most often a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p.8). The assigned labels ultimately provide an inventory of topics for indexing and cataloging, which is helpful for studies with a wide variety of data forms, including large texts. The primary goal in using descriptive coding for this study is to develop a system of codes that categorize the public statements that name racism and anti-Black racism, address on campus racism, and speak directly to the institution’s commitment to anti-racism.

Researcher Positionality

As a higher education professional, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of a formal education. As a Black male professional in higher education, I have also witnessed the astonishing ways that systemic racism continues to remain at the very core of our most fundamental educational aspirations. Like the scholars who explored critical race theory, my positionality is not just based on novel research interests, but lived experience. I recognize that there are a variety of struggles that permeate the higher education landscape. The various intersections that exist among students, faculty, and staff are microcosmic to what we see in the outside world. And although my passion seeks to respect and elevate inclusive perspectives, I believe there should be a critical and central focus on anti-Black racism and the ways in which it

continues to reside in the higher education atmosphere. I have personally experienced racism in higher education since the origin of my career. Each job that I have transitioned out of had something to do with my racialized experience therein. After the killing of George Floyd and the ensuing public outcry, I observed how many higher education institutions released public statements. I was personally disappointed by the statement released by my current institution and decided to speak out to college leadership. This led to a larger research interest as I developed a passion for looking deeper into the rhetoric, which ultimately landed me on a dissertation topic. My belief is that public statements issued from large Division 1/Research 1 institutions in the UW System will more directly address racism on their campuses. However, it is also my prediction that only a small number of statements will directly address anti-Black racism.

Significance

Leaders in higher education are beginning to see the evidence of shifting demographics in American society. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics and the United States Census Bureau, by 2044, more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone). By 2060, approximately 20% of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign born. Rising globalization in concert with perennial racial/ethnic disparities should cause college leaders to reimagine outdated notions of leadership, inclusion, and democracy, and elevate their thinking towards a revised social contract with higher education (Green & Trent, 2005). Higher education is a microcosm of

society at large. Therefore, increasing globalization has resulted in increased diversification on American college campuses. However, diversity does not always equal inclusion. College leaders now face the additional responsibility of fostering an inclusive society that makes room for the unique and complex needs of individuals from historically marginalized communities. Responding appropriately to issues of race, racism, and anti-Black racism is part of that responsibility.

This study is significant because it will seek to challenge traditional norms of communication, particularly around anti-Black racism. Conversely, students, faculty, staff, and general employees of color should not necessarily rely on institutional statements for comfort or even emotional support, but for reassurance. Reassurance that the institution they pay to attend values their lives as much as they do their tuition. Reassurance that the institution they give their ideas, thoughts, and perspectives to is concerned with the mental trauma associated with direct and indirect racialized experiences. Reassurance that their safety will not be compromised by lazy rhetoric that ultimately encourages copycat behavior. Racial conflict should not have to manifest itself for higher education leaders to give issues concerning students of color their undivided attention. However, effective institutional responses to issues of race and racism are a necessary intelligence for college leaders in order to progress towards a more inclusive campus community and society. From a larger institutional perspective, this study could have an impact on long-term communications strategies. As campus leaders continue to engage in mass communication with students, faculty, staff, and community stakeholders, this study may serve as a reference for effective communication around issues of race and racism.

CHAPTER II
**SO WHATCHA SAYIN': ANALYZING STATEMENTS ADDRESSING ANTI-BLACK
RACISM IN 2020**

Abstract

For decades, racial incidents have routinely occurred on college campuses (Cole & Harper, 2017). However, a series of highly publicized *off-campus* acts of racial violence between February and September 2020 ignited a national reckoning on race, racism, anti-Black racism, and the role of higher education in systemic discrimination. In response, a number of college and university leaders published public statements attempting to address anti-Black racism both nationally and also on their respective campuses. The purpose of this study is to take a closer look at how colleges and universities in the University of Wisconsin System (UW-System) utilize public statements to address anti-Black racism. Utilizing critical race theory as a theoretical framework, as well as Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation for data analysis, this study analyzed a total of 27 statements from 13 institutions. Findings explore what terms were utilized to describe the death of George Floyd (and potentially others who were murdered), who and/or what is at the center of the written statements, and what actions the institutions commit to taking in order to mitigate anti-Black racism in their campus communities. Finally, I conclude with implications for practice and a scholarly reflection.

Keywords: critical race theory, critical discourse analysis, race, racism, anti-Black racism

Introduction

The year 2020 will be remembered and discussed as one of the most societal-shifting years in world history, but the public discourse won't just be about COVID-19, it will also include another global pandemic – one that predates the nation's founding. The pandemic known as anti-Black racism is likely to be researched just as much as, if not more than, any other topic that received attention that particular year, specifically, the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man who was killed by Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020. Chauvin, a White police officer, knelt on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds resulting in his death. The murder was caught on camera by a 9-year-old Black girl and went viral, resulting in countless reactions from people across the global spectrum, including higher education. There were many other viral moments of anti-Black racism as well. Including the deaths of Breonna Taylor and Ahmed

Arbery, to the paralyzing and near-fatal police shooting of Jacob Blake. This series of events was followed by an unforgettable season of public resistance demonstrations across the country and in many parts of the world. There were many other viral moments of anti-Black racism as well. Including the deaths of Breonna Taylor and Ahmed Arbery, to the near fatal police shooting of Jacob Blake. This series of events was followed by an unforgettable season of public resistance demonstrations across the country and in many parts of the world.

In the days that followed the brutal murder of George Floyd, a number of colleges and universities released public statements addressing the murder as well as other acts of anti-Black racism that took place between February and August of 2020. While some of universities' public statements were well received, many who viewed the statements noted a particular kind of performative speech. Ahmed (2005) refers to a performative utterance within the context of speech as a statement that does what it says it does. However, although public statements often admit to the existence of racism on their campus, such admissions only go so far in furthering the cause of anti-racism. While it is not uncommon for college and university leaders to release public statements, it is critical that these particular statements be analyzed in ways to examine how their discourse may actually serve to further anti-Blackness.

The purpose of this study is to take a closer look at how colleges and universities in the University of Wisconsin System (UW-System) utilize public statements to address anti-Black racism. Carruthers (2018) defined anti-Blackness as “the system of beliefs and practices that attack, erode, and limit the humanity of Black people” (p.7). Anti-Black racism is expressions, acts, and practices of racism against Black people that often captures national attention through the utilization of mass media (Carruthers, 2018). It is critical that these statements be analyzed as language and how racists acts – when discussed – constitute speech acts, which inform readers

about institutional values. Therefore, the leading research question for this study is: How do institutional statements address anti-Black racism in the US and on campus? Particularly, this study seeks to get an understanding of how various institutions frame racist act including, the number of statements issued by universities within the system, the authors of the statements, and the language used to discuss anti-Black racism.

Review of the Literature

This review of literature will explore what research says about how institutions have responded to acts of on-campus racism. Particular attention is given to literature that details the importance of institutional statements, who and what is centered within those statements, and gaps in the existing body of literature. Finally, this review of literature will conclude with the theoretical framework that guides this study.

Davis and Harris (2016) define institutional response to on-campus racism as “statements released by those allegedly responsible for the racial incident” (p.63). Although his definition focuses on acts of racism that take place on campus, it contextualizes the nature of responsibility that campus leaders should feel in response to highly publicized acts of anti-Black racism in various communities off campus that have long-term implications for campus climate. Key findings reveal three overarching themes: a restatement of institutional espoused values, directing students back to resources as opposed to commitment to action, and emphasizing White-centric ideology.

Restating Institutional Espoused Values

A discourse analysis of institutional responses to student activism conducted by Hoffman and Mitchell (2016) found that student leaders and activists expressed concerns regarding the

practice of highlighting the campus' stated values as a foundational part of the overall statement. The authors suggest that institutional leaders rely too much on current efforts and practices, much of which may already be missing the mark on supporting students of color (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Davis and Harris (2015) concluded that institutional responses often give voice to administrators who are more concerned with restoring the image and reputation of the institution, rather than addressing or committing to repairing the harm done to students of color. Mwangi et al. (2019) studied the tone of 139 institutional responses to the rescission of the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Their findings reveal that most statements reflected a failure to take a clear position and showed a tendency for statements to express a commitment to the institution's mission and values (p.259).

Centralizing Whiteness

Public statements addressing on-campus racism also showed a tendency to emphasize colorblindness. Researchers reported that statements rarely situated racial incidents within the larger context of systemic and institutional oppression and reflected a desire to achieve a post-racial society (Cole & Harper, 2017; Davis & Harris, 2015; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Mwangi, Latafat, Thampikutty, & Van, 2016;). The authors also found that statements addressing racism often place the responsibility to improve campus racial climate on all parties within the institution while failing to acknowledge the very real power differences that exist between racial ethnic groups in both employee and student communities (Cole & Harper, 2017; Davis and Harris, 2015; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Mwangi, Latafat, Thampikutty, & Van, 2016). This practice contributes to the centralization of Whiteness and leaves people of color to do the heavy lifting once the campus has moved on from the incident (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Several statements released by college presidents avoided mentioning the racial incident that took place

on their campus and instead broadly referred to the acts as “campus concerns” (Cole & Harper, 2017). The practice of shaping, shifting, and refocusing narratives contributes to the centralization of White dominant ideology on college campuses. This can be demonstrated by statements that show hesitation around acknowledging the harm done and shifted the focus to intentions rather than impact.

Directing Students to Campus Resources

The practice of directing students to existing campus resources as opposed to an articulation of action unexpectedly emerged as a theme in the body of literature. Garcia et al. (2019) studied institutional responses to events challenging campus climate and found that many of the statements articulated the institution’s stance on the situation or issue yet did not include specific action items beyond referring students to existing campus resources such as multicultural centers and counseling services. This appeared to be a habitual communications practice as the majority of the statements analyzed directed readers to existing documents regarding equity and diversity (i.e., institutional and departmental mission statements and strategic plans) as a demonstration of the institution’s ongoing commitment (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). In other words, there appears to be a trend among institutional statements addressing racial injustice to direct students to read more statements addressing racial injustice.

Theoretical Framework

Since its inception, critical race theory (CRT) has boldly challenged the ways in which race, racism, and White supremacy are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole. As the goal of this study is to examine the public discourse around anti-Black racism, the goal of CRT is to make sense of how deeply ideological issues of race and power continue to matter in American society (Bell, 1980; West,

1995; Crenshaw, 1988). The theory was introduced to the field of educational research by a community of progressive scholars of color in an attempt to advance research where issues of race were concerned. Scholars argued that race was undertheorized in education and the existing literature suffered from a lack of conceptual and analytic tools to discuss race, develop operational structures around it, and ultimately examine critical issues related to race in education (Bell, 1980; Cole & Harper, 2017; Milner, 2007; West, 1995; Williams Crenshaw, 1988). Scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, William F. Tate, Derrick A. Bell, Jr. Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, and Linda Greene (among others) sought to provide a set of tools for thinking about race that avoided the traps of racialized thinking. The literature engages in a discourse of civil rights reform and pushes back against traditional civil rights discourse, which refers to idealistic views about racial equality resulting in a popular imagination of the civil rights movements of the late fifties and sixties (Bell, 1980; West, 1995; Williams Crenshaw, 1988).

Central Tenets of Critical race theory

CRT draws on three central tenets: (a) the ingrained nature of race and racism; (b) the importance of narrative, counter-narrative, and centralizing stories told by people of color; and (c), interest convergence (Cole & Harper, 2017; Milner, 2007). First, scholars argue that race and racism are endemic, pervasive, widespread, and ingrained in society and thus in education (Milner, 2007). Their position is that the individuals who make up the educational community are socialized into a racial society; therefore, matters of practice and strategy are influenced by matters of race and racism (Milner, 2007). Second, CRT theorists argue that knowledge can and should be generated through the narratives and counter-narratives that emerge from and with people of color (Milner, 2007, p.391). In other words, critical race theory seeks to challenge

White-centric and patriarchal ideologies and emphasize the multiple and varied voices and viewpoints of people of color, thus empowering them to tell stories that are often different from the dominant narratives around race and racism. Narrative and counter-narrative should be captured by the researcher, experienced by the research participants, and told by people of color (Milner, 2007).

Finally, critical race theorists describe the third tenet, interest convergence, as an analytical construct that takes into account the motivating factors needed in order to eradicate racial discrimination or provide remedies for racial injustice (Donner, 2005; Milner, 2007). The simple yet complex nature of CRT makes it one of the more thought-provoking theoretical frameworks in the field of educational research. Race and racism are social constructs that are often visualized to be too large to get over and too wide to get around but, CRT assists individuals with this thought pattern to bring race, racism, and anti-Black racism to scale, allowing for theoretical parameters around an otherwise boundless topic. CRT provides an appropriate lens for this study to address the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain dominant racial positions. CRT offers insights, pedagogies, and perspectives that shed light on how race and racism are endemic and present within written texts.

Methodology and Methods

This study utilizes Fairclough and Wodak's (1997) critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a methodological approach to explore the ways in which language is a social action that has the ability to obscure agency. CDA is a form of social discourse analysis that takes into account the context of language use to be essential to general discourse (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fairclough, 2006). To that end, this study explores how written texts can influence the shaping of narratives and the establishment and maintenance of power relations. This methodology is

one that notes not just the words in any written or spoken discourse, but how those words are arranged. This methodology looks to see how things are described, who is specifically named, who is not named, and other grammatical points, such as passive voice.

For example, the following is an excerpt from a statement released by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Police Department: “And while there are moral and tactical shortcomings here, there exists the added weight in the knowledge that these occurred in the all-too-often context of police victimizing an unarmed person of color – sadly, an unsurprising tragedy.” This particular excerpt is an example of how written text can obscure agency because the author utilizes neutral terminology such as “moral and tactical shortcomings” to describe the role of police brutality in the murder of George Floyd. Additionally, the statement fails to directly name anti-Black racism in the attempt to highlight the historical context. Neglecting to call out White supremacist violence in policing and failing to directly name who is most affected by that violence obscure not only the actor (i.e., Derek Chauvin) but also the victim and the community most affected (i.e., utilizing language such as “unarmed person of color” as opposed to Black or African American people). Rather than a singular methodology, critical discourse analysis can be viewed as an approach, one that pays particular attention to the variety of cultural and economic dimensions significant in the relationship between the use of language, social context, and power relations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

Research Site

This study surveyed statements released by institutions situated within the University of Wisconsin System. The University of Wisconsin System (also known as the UW System) educates approximately 170,000 students at 13 universities across 26 campuses; 2.8% of total system enrollment is African American, 6.2% Latinx, 1.8% Southeast Asian, 0.4% Native

American, and 76.2% White. Similarly, African Americans make up 2.9% of all employees and 4.8% of administrators and academic leaders, while Whites make up 74.5% of total employees and 85.9% of administrators and academic leaders.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study analyzed a total of 27 statements. Each university released one statement, and one particular institution released a total of 15 statements (over half of all statements analyzed for this study). This study utilized descriptive coding to analyze written statements addressing racism released by colleges in the UW-System. According to Miles et al (2013), “A descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase—most often a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p.8). The assigned labels ultimately provided an inventory of topics for indexing and cataloging, which was helpful for the purposes of categorizing the statements that named racism and anti-Black racism, addressed on campus racism, and spoke directly to the institution’s commitment to anti-racism. For example, after initial review of universities’ statements I noted a pattern emerged regarding who was specifically named and who was not. I noted in many of the statements the schools noted George Floyd specifically, but no other Black individual who had been murdered. I noted, as a code, who was mentioned and who was left out of statements. Another code I found emerge was how the murder of George Floyd was described. For instance, some noted he was murdered while other institutions noted that “he died.” I noted the differences in these in codes to engage in analysis.

Findings

The findings that emerged from this study are organized according to three key areas: (a) terminology and syntax used within university statements, (b) the centralization of certain narratives in each statement, and (c) action and/or lack of action orientation in statements.

Specifically, the findings explore what terms were utilized to describe the death of George Floyd (and potentially others who were murdered), who and/or what is at the center of the written statements, and what actions the institutions commit to taking in order to mitigate anti-Black racism in their campus communities.

Terminology and Syntax

Many of the institutional statements released were done so in response to the murder of George Floyd, however, Floyd's death was referenced in a variety of interesting ways. For example, six institutions indicated that Floyd had "died," "passed," or "lost his life." The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay wrote that Floyd's death was a "tragic loss of life." Similarly, the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for South Asia referred to the murder of Floyd as "Mr. Floyd's passing." Both the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Business referred to Floyd's death as "the killing of George Floyd." However, 11 statements utilized "the death of George Floyd" as a general reference.

Other institutional statements utilized descriptive adjectives. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Platteville wrote of "the horrific killings of..." While referring to the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others. The University of Wisconsin-River Falls utilized language such as "the unjustified and brutal death of George Floyd." The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater referred to "the premature death of George Floyd." The University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of the Chancellor referred to it as "the inexcusable death of George Floyd" and the School of Education at the same institution wrote, "the unnecessary death of George Floyd." The statement released by the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement at the same institution referenced Mr. Floyd's "lifeless body being lifted off the concrete, on to a stretcher to give semblance of care for what many

already knew was a dead man.” In one case, the Office of Sustainability at the University of Wisconsin-Madison did not mention the death of George Floyd and instead condemned “racist violence, racist policy, and racist ideology.”

Very few statements inserted the phrase “Black Lives Matter” into their narrative. Specifically, among the 27 statements analyzed, only four actually stated the words “Black Lives Matter,” either in support of the notion or in direct reference to the movement itself. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire stated “...we know that Black Lives Matter.” The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee stated, “we have reached yet another critical moment when individuals as well as institutions need to take a clear and vocal stance on racial and social justice and insist, again, that Black Lives Matter.” The University of Wisconsin-Madison German, Nordic, and Slavic Department in the College of Letters and Sciences stated, [T]o our Black and Brown colleagues, students, friends, and family: we see your grief and acknowledge your righteous anger. Black Lives Matter! BIPOC matter!” However, other statements referenced the phrase in more delicate ways. For example, while addressing “Brown and Black colleagues,” the author of a statement released by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Information Technology office stated “I want to work with you and learn from you. Your lives matter.”

Centralization of Narratives

The findings in this study also looked into a centralization of narratives, particularly who and/or what is at the center of the written statements. There appeared to be a pattern of three key messages: (a) statements of solidarity, (b) denunciation of racism (or some form such as police brutality, White supremacy, etc.) and (c) a declaration of institutional and/or individual values.

Statement of Solidarity

Statements of solidarity for those affected by anti-Black racism appeared in many of the statements researched for this study. For example, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee began their statement by declaring that “we write in strong solidarity and support for our Black students, staff, and faculty; our students, staff, and faculty of color; and the communities we serve.” The American Indian Studies Department at the same institution wrote, “American Indian Studies at UWM stands in solidarity with Black Lives Matter.” The statement released by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls expressed “solidarity with the communities who are most impacted by these events, especially our students and employees of color.” The statement released by the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison read, “the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison stands in solidarity with those in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and other states across the country who are rising up in support of Black Lives.” The Mead Witter School of Music at the same institution wrote, “we feel that it is a matter of human dignity and duty to express our outrage and stand with our Black community members including students, faculty, and staff. We also stand in solidarity with those who are protesting anti-Black injustice in all its forms.”

Denunciation of Racism

Many of the statements analyzed for this study openly denounced and condemned racism and/or other forms of White supremacy. Some were open condemnations while others were more subtle in their approach. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee stated, “we condemn and speak out against White supremacy.” The University of Wisconsin-Platteville stated, “[P]olice being weaponized against our Black communities and the protest for change in our society have again highlighted the extreme pain and injustice that persist and so significantly

impact the world we live in today.” The Department of Gender and Women’s Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison stated, “[W]e condemn White supremacy, police violence, and all forms of racism, interpersonal and structural, and we honor the pain that these forces have caused for our Black students, faculty, and staff.” The German, Nordic, and Slavic Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison stated, “we deplore violence in any form, physical, emotional or systemic.” In reference to their departmental ideals, the Office of Sustainability at the University of Wisconsin-Madison wrote, “racist violence, racist policy, and racist ideology are antithetical to these ideals.” The Center for Leadership and Involvement at the same institution wrote, “[T]his tragic act serves as a stark reminder of the existing and historical oppression of our Black and African American communities.” Finally, the University of Wisconsin-Madison Police Department stated, “And while there are moral and tactical shortcomings here, there exists the added weight in the knowledge that these occurred in the all-too-often context of police victimizing an unarmed person of color – sadly, an unsurprising tragedy.”

Declaration of Values

Another key message theme was a declaration of values. Of the 27 statements analyzed, each one spent time declaring the values of the institution, and in some cases the personal values of the author. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh affirmed their institution as “a beacon for learning and transformation.” The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee stated, “we encourage diverse classrooms and recognize the importance of the plurality of experiences and perspectives.” The University of Wisconsin-River Falls reiterated their commitment to “a community of mutual respect, professional behavior, academic freedom and appreciation of individual differences and rich cultural diversity.” The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

stated, “we respect differences and welcome diversity. We foster an inclusive environment.” The University of Wisconsin-Parkside wrote, “The challenging events occurring in our region, state, and nation remind us of the importance of our core values of dignity and respect, and validate our shared commitment to higher education.” The University of Wisconsin-Platteville stated “hate is NOT a UW-Platteville value.”

In other cases, the author spent time affirming their own personal values and perspectives on anti-Black racism. The author of the statement released by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls stated, “I am outraged and heartbroken over what has occurred.” Similarly, the author of the statement released by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point stated, “I am personally heartbroken about this incident and the injustice that has occurred too many times in America.” The author of the statement released by the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater stated, “as a Black man, it does give me pause when I must be cautious as I walk the street at night, but I am confident that the Whitewater community will continue to be a safe learning and working environment.” The author of the statement released by the Division of Diversity, Equity & Educational Achievement at the University of Wisconsin-Madison said, “my soul is heavy. Heavy from, what is up until now, only understood by those of us afflicted by the daily fear of living in a society that has difficulty seeing Black and Brown people as complete, full human beings.” The author of the statement released by the School of Business at the same institution wrote, “despite being a man of color and an immigrant, I cannot pretend to understand fully what it means to live as a Black person in America today.”

Action Orientation

Finally, the findings reveal a variety of action orientations, or expressions of intended action steps by the institution to mitigate racism in their campus communities. The degree of

action-oriented expressions within the statements analyzed were wide-ranging. Some were bold and gave very specific actions. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee called for an end to the institution's relationship with the city police department stating the following: "[B]y formal agreement, our campus police force is assisted by and assists the Milwaukee Police Department. We call for an end to this relationship, which historically has resulted in the profiling of UWM students of color." The University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Business made the following commitment, "we will be more intentional about diversifying our faculty and staff. We will begin by identifying barriers that keep people of color from being hired and retained as faculty and staff our our school. We commit to a process that is blind to bias and attracts a more diverse pool of qualified candidates. We will also explore partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to further diversify our WSB classrooms."

Other statements committed less than specific institutional actions. For example, the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse made, on behalf of the entire athletic staff, "a pact to do more. To be better. To stand up for the voices of Black and Brown people whose voices are silenced. To produce change that effects [sic] the systemic racism in this country." The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire wrote, "[T]he administration is working on the logistics of making campus as safe as possible, and the department is working to make our classes effective while keeping ourselves and our students safe." The Center for South Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison stated, "I am committed to identifying training and learning opportunities we can take part in as a division. You will hear more from me about these next steps soon." The University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse stated, "[W]e will fight with you against police brutality, and many other injustices, so there can be justice for George Floyd." The Department of Gender and Women's

Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison stated, “[A]s educators and as feminists, we pledge not only to continue our fight for racial justice, but to intensify that fight to meet the scale of the crises with which we are faced in the present moment.”

A wide number of statements included encouragements to readers to take certain actions for themselves. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Superior wrote, “[W]e encourage you to reach out to family and friends. Bear witness and listen with your heart where it is needed most. Stand together in community and please take care of yourselves the best you can.” The author of the statement released by the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater stated, “I would invite you to continue to have healthy and productive discussions surrounding these topics as you are able.” The author of the statement released University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point expressed, “I challenge each member of our community of teachers and learners to do our part by drowning out the voice of intolerance with acts of kindness.” The University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh stated, “let us recognize our progress and our failings and work together to be true champions of inclusion, not purveyors of division.” The School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison wrote, “we encourage all of you to lean on your support networks during these painful times.” The International Division at the same institution wrote, “I encourage you to talk with each other to process your feelings and share ideas.”

Discussion

As evidenced in the terminology and syntax used in the statements above, many schools used passive voice and/or statements as if Mr. Floyd somehow died without giving much context to the way in which he was killed, thereby failing to name White supremacy as the main culprit. As Fairclough (1995) noted, circulated texts have the power to divert attention away from the more complex issues of equity and justice. Vague framing such as this unfairly casts the victims

as sole actors, giving of the appearance that such an incident happened naturally and not as a result of systemic racism. Furthermore, out of all of the statements that were analyzed for this study, none mentioned Derek Chauvin, the police officer who murdered Mr. Floyd. Crafting a statement about such a heinous act of anti-Black racism in such a way obscures the actor and the system of racism, resulting in a certain kind of anonymity that only serves to protect White supremacy.

Conversely, there were many statements that called out White supremacy in clear language. This is particularly important because widely circulated written communication has the potential to impact the discourse around a particular situation, ultimately serving to either elevate or suppress certain voices (Fairclough, 1995, 2006; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Rogers, 2004). Statements that directly name the actor, the system, and call attention to the historical realities have the power to frame narratives and redefine current thinking. Therefore, it is critically important that statements addressing anti-Black racism appropriately name the system of White supremacy that serves as a foundation to anti-Black racism.

Regarding the centralization of narratives, solidarity statements seemed to be the most common approach to leading into the statements released. Perhaps the thought process around this was to lead with a show of support for those who are most affected. Solidarity is a necessary component of empathetic writing; however, a statement of solidarity can also be viewed as performative speech and can come across as inauthentic. Also, solidarity statements can be highly political due to the fact that they are in written text and will be accessed by researchers and scholars for years. This means that the authors who pen these statements may not feel the empathy themselves but feel the political pressure to stand in solidarity, even if they share different personal views.

Regarding the phrase “Black Lives Matter,” some statements openly made the declaration, some found alternative ways to state the value of Black lives, and others avoided the usage of the phrase altogether. This is an important distinction to make because of the ways in which the phrase has been highly politicized since coming to prominence in the early 2010s. Colleges and Universities that release statements in solidarity for Black lives, yet choose not to openly state that those lives matter, are positioning themselves to care more about the political fallout of the phrase than the true meaning behind it.

Another common tactic present within the statements was the centralization of the author. In many cases, the authors themselves wrote about their own experiences with racism, some even comparing their personal experiences in an attempt to empathize with the larger student and employee bodies of color. While this may appear to be a harmless gesture, it can also come across as changing the narrative from White supremacists’ violence to a centralization of the authors’ personal views and experiences. Those who are dealing with the trauma of witnessing and processing through anti-Black violence can find themselves retraumatized by reading a statement that ultimately serves the author’s interests.

In regard to action orientation, it is important to note that the degree to which these statements can achieve and real action is minimal. It is also important to remember that simply making an action-oriented statement is not enough to adequately address issues of anti-Black racism nor deconstruct the system of racism that is present and prevalent in higher education. Nonetheless, action orientation is a critically important element of institutional statements addressing anti-Black racism. Of the statements analyzed, all contained some element of action orientation. Some statements were bold and specific while others were filled with what James

Baldwin (2011) referred to as “imprecise words.” I would like to discuss both sides of the action-orientation within the statements, the specific and the imprecise.

In consideration of the bold and specific, statements that contain clear language around the actions their institutions intend to take in order to mitigate racism on their campuses can serve to create a public accountability mindset among leaders and decision makers. The idea is that clearly stating very specific action items to the entire campus community and countless others via the internet and social media means that the institution will be more inclined to follow through on those actions. Additionally, naming specific action items forces leaders to think more critically about what they put into writing. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s commitment to end the relationship with the city’s police department is a specific action that can be called into question if unaddressed. This sends a clear message to the reader that addressing systemic racism is a priority. On the contrary, imprecise words also have their place in public statements addressing anti-Black racism. From a trauma-informed perspective, statements that are careful with words and sensitive to the nature of the situation can protect the reader from additional trauma. Finally, a connection can be made back to the second central tenet of critical race theory, which explores the impact of racism in narratives, counter-narratives, and stories told by people of color (Milner, 2007). In summary, public statements addressing anti-Black racism have the power to create and recreate narratives that either serve to elevate or suppress marginalized voices.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Higher education practitioners in decision-making positions who have the power to frame and reframe institutional narratives should consider the following recommendations and implications for practice when crafting statements that address anti-Black racism. The

recommendations offered in this study will utilize Bitzer's (1968) theory of the rhetorical situation as a guiding framework. Bitzer (1968) defined the rhetorical situation:

a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse introduced into the situation can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence (p. 6; Cole & Harper, 2017, p.321).

Bitzer also summarizes the rhetorical situation as “those contexts in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse” (Bitzer, 1968, p.1). There are three core elements to the rhetorical situation: (a) exigence, (b) audience, and (c) constraints. The exigence represents the urgency, the audience represents those who are influenced by the urgency, and the constraints represent the actions needed to be taken in order to modify the urgency (Bitzer, 1968; Cole & Harper, 2017). Bitzer's blend of situational characteristics provides a unique way to study institutional response to highly publicized acts anti-Black racism because each one comes with an individual set of urgencies that impact the communication with the audience (i.e., students, faculty, staff, and community) and the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify those urgencies (Bitzer, 1968). Simply stated, Bitzer suggests that each situation comes with an urgency that impacts the communication we have with the audience, and that communication has the power to influence actions. To that end, the following sections are outlined according to each element in Bitzer's framework.

Exigence: Move with Haste, but don't rush

In today's fast paced world of digital communication, social media, and misinformation campaigns, the general public expects its news to arrive to their devices at rapid speed. So it can be rightly predicted that the public, as well as the various communities within the institution, are likely to expect a swift institutional response to an occurrence like the murder of George Floyd.

Such circumstances place added pressure onto institutional leaders to craft a meaningful statement that is representative of the entire institution in a short amount of time, causing institutional leaders to experience intense anxiety when tasked with the challenge of crafting an institutional statement addressing anti-Black racism.

Therefore, the first recommendation for leaders is to move with haste, but don't rush. This recommendation is particularly important because public statements that are released too quickly and without much thought given to the content, its intended audience, and the structure are likely to add to the trauma already experienced by the community of Black students, faculty, and staff who read them. In short, institutional leaders must be time conscious when crafting a statement of this kind. Conversely, allowing too much separation between the act of anti-Black racism and the institutional response can cause the institution and its leaders to come across as lacking care and compassion for the situation at hand. Institutional leaders should consider releasing a statement within one calendar week (7 days) from being made aware of the act of anti-Black racism. Proximity to the act is critical and seven calendar days gives institutional leaders the necessary time to appropriately research the act, mobilize and consult with campus partners, and craft a meaningful statement. For context, George Floyd was killed on Monday, May 25, 2020. The earliest statements were released by the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Police Department on May 27, 2020. The latest statement was released by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee on June 15, 2020. Of the 27 statements analyzed for this study, 12 were released within eight days of Floyd's death. That's roughly one week, considering many institutions likely did not become aware of the act until May 26, which was when the first day of public demonstrations was reported.

Audience: One size does not fit all!

The next consideration for institutional leaders who are confronted with the urgency of responding to an act of anti-Black racism is the audience. This begs, perhaps the most important question in the development of a statement of this kind: Who are these words intended for? As mentioned in the Findings section, each statement contains a centralization of narratives that either serve to elevate or suppress marginalized voices. Of the statements analyzed for this study, very few seemed to intentionally centralize anti-Black racism as the primary narrative. The majority of statements centralized the institution, and some authors centralized themselves by utilizing their platform to discuss their own personal stories, thoughts, and perspectives about race. Institutional leaders should be intentional about not only who will be reading the statement, but who will be most impacted. In other words, the statement should never be about the author. It should always be about the communities most affected by the act. Institutional leaders should be willing to work in collaboration with campus partners to craft statements that speak specifically to various communities. Depending on the situation, institutional leaders may need to craft multiple statements of solidarity intentionally geared towards specific identities. For example, in the wake of George Floyd's murder, a statement to the Black student, faculty, staff, and community members can be crafted and sent only to those individuals via email. A copy of the statement can also be located on the institution's website. Statements may also need to be crafted to speak directly to White students, faculty, and staff not to centralize them, but to provide perspective and foster appropriate allyship.

Constraints: Actions needed in order to meet the urgency

Bitzer's (1968) theory focuses on constraints that impact the actions needed in order to meet the urgency of a particular situation. Stated another way, institutional leaders who are

crafting public statements addressing anti-Black racism should be mindful of a variety of constraints such as, (a) campus partners, (b) language utilization, and (c) action orientation. Campus partners include institutional and community stakeholders who are involved in the discussions leading up to the release of an institutional statement addressing anti-Black racism. Language utilization involves intentional syntax and terminology designed to communicate a certain narrative. Action orientation denotes expressions of intended action steps by the institution to mitigate racism in their campus.

Campus Partners

Institutional leaders crafting statements addressing anti-Black racism should be thoughtful and intentional about who is involved in the intimate discussions and developments leading up to the release of the statement. Institutional leaders should be concerned with who is in the room and who isn't. Consider such guiding questions as: what key personnel should be involved in the larger level discussions across the campus, and who will be involved in the writing process? On a micro level, it is recommended that institutions form a team of respected campus partners to be called upon to offer strategic vision and guidance in the development of statements addressing anti-Black racism. This team should be made up of individuals representing various factions of the institution (i.e., students, faculty, staff, administrators, etc.). Those involved would be called upon to either conceptualize, edit, or read and review the statement before it is released. Such a committee can add perspective to the document that can be helpful in the long term. On a macro level, institutional leaders should conduct a full review of their marketing and public relations departments (or related campus unit). This is important because these are the individuals who are involved in not only prepping the statement for release

but also the necessary follow-up work of connecting with media, fielding questions from citizens, and crafting future communications addressing anti-Black racism. Simply put, if there is no representation in the institution's marketing and public relations departments, and no identified campus task force to review and revise publications of this kind, institutional leaders are at risk of releasing a statement that not only misses the mark but may serve to retraumatize the communities most impacted by the racist act. This could result in lower enrollment and/or retention rates for Black students and high turnover of Black faculty and staff. In summary, when crafting a statement addressing anti-Black racism, institutional leaders should be very thoughtful as to who is at the table during the very important discussions leading up to and through the development and release.

Language Utilization

Words matter! They have the power to shift meanings, shape narratives, and start movements. Institutional leaders should utilize language that intentionally calls out the system of White supremacy and does not obscure White actors. Institutional leaders should avoid harmonious anecdotes that hint to the reality of anti-Black racism but fail to address it in clear language. For example, among the 27 statements analyzed, only four actually stated the words "Black Lives Matter," (roughly 14%). This is an important disaggregation due to the political polarization of the phrase itself. However, the utilization of this particular phrase should be considered an intentional way to affirm Black lives rather than a political stance. It is also important to note that not all Black people have bought into the Black Lives Matter movement. Therefore, if institutions choose not to insert the phrase, there should be clear language affirming the lives of Black people *and* denouncing White supremacist violence.

Additionally, there appeared to be a common practice of emphasizing and re-emphasizing the presumed emotions felt by Black people and people of color. For example, one statement claimed the following: “Each of us is feeling very different emotions: hurt, anger, fear, sadness, and uncertainty.” Another statement lamented on “the anger that members of our community feel over years of unequal treatment.” These examples present a pattern of casting emotions and feelings onto Black people through written discourse. This practice reinforces negative stereotypes about how Black people experience racism, resulting in a false sense of emotional intelligence for both allies and adversaries.

Action Orientation

In the process of developing action items to include in an institutional statement addressing anti-Black racism, leaders should consider action steps that are meaningful and measurable and avoid performative action steps that lack depth and sincerity. For example, the author of the statement released by the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse made a commitment... “to do more. To be better. To stand up for the voices of Black and Brown people whose voices are silenced.” Although well intended, this action item does very little to affect change. How exactly does the author and the institution at large intend to “stand up” for the voices of Black and Brown students? What actions will the institution take in order to elevate those voices? Furthermore, how do we know those voices have even been silenced? What research has the institution conducted in order to get an understanding of the needs and concerns of Black students, faculty, and staff at the university prior to making that claim? This particular passage is dangerous because it likely assumes that the voices of Black and Brown students are “silenced” and the claim to “stand up” for those voices speaks to a centuries old White savior complex that

is still pervasive throughout academic leadership. A more specific action item would be to commission a task force to review the campus's organizational structure in order to determine where additional services and resources may be needed in order to elevate Black voices on campus. The resulting information could lead to additional departments, positions, and identified fiscal resources that would serve the university's intended purpose.

Another example of a performative action item can be seen in the statement released by the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, "the administration is working on the logistics of making campus as safe as possible, and the department is working to make our classes effective while keeping ourselves and our students safe." This particular action item is puzzling because it suggests that the campus is lacking in safety, but it does not specify who is unsafe or what they are unsafe from. Is the author suggesting that the campus isn't safe for Black students or people of color in general? Is the author suggesting that the campus should take more measures to stop acts of racism on campus? A more specific statement could include commitments to conduct an institutional review of the university police's policies, procedures, and hiring practices in order to determine areas of bias. The university could also commit to partnering with institutional research to survey Black students, faculty, and staff around the college in order to gain relevant information about their experiences with campus safety. The resulting information could inform new and better campus safety protocols that speak directly to the needs and concerns of the university's Black community. These are commitments that can be measured and also present an accountability factor to the institution and the communities most impacted by the act of racism.

Conclusion

The title of this article, "So Whatcha Sayin" is a nod to the classic 1988 smash hit record released in 1988 by hip hop duo EPMD. The founding members are Erick Sermon and Parrish

Smith and EPMD is an acronym for that stands for Erick and Parrish Making Dollars. To be clear, there are no lyrics within the song that directly connect to the mission of this study. The title, however, is a direct question that I believe applies to the nature of this study. The simple truth is, as a researcher I wanted to know, what are these statements *really* saying? What do they mean? What is the purpose? So, what are you saying? The words colleges and universities issue constitute messaging to students, faculty, staff, alumni, and indeed entire state systems of education. It is critical that they engage in discourse that centers and works to combat anti-Blackness. Although many of the findings in this study reveal patterns of institutional uncertainty in how to address anti-Black racism, there were also examples that were clear, specific, and meaningful in their approach. To be clear, no statement released can undo the harm of over four centuries of anti-Black oppression, however, the words we use to tell the story must serve to centralize Black lives and affirm the institution's anti-racist commitment.

CHAPTER III

SCHOLARLY REFLECTION

Introduction

This study sought to explore ways in which institutions of higher education in the UW-System responded to and addressed anti-blackness after anti-black national tragedies occurred throughout the United States. Specifically, the origin point of this research experience can be traced back to May 25, 2020, the day that George Floyd was murdered by Derek Chauvin. Like many, I was initially shocked at witnessing such a heinous act but was immediately confronted with feelings of familiarity and even expectation. I expected to witness this again as I had witnessed it many times throughout my life. I expected for the public outcry to take place soon thereafter. I expected there to be massive news media coverage and the expressions of selective outrage on social media. I even expected for the contestation of Floyd's humanity through accusations of his past drug use, criminal history, and/or other life circumstances that are often used against Black people to indicate their lives are not worth anything.

I continued to process through what I was experiencing; I was forced to admit that this time felt different. It impacted me in a way that resulted in sort of a psychological paralysis. I was unable to concentrate on anything except for the lingering image in my mind of Floyd's last few moments of life. It was almost as if it were *me* lying there between the concrete and Chauvin's knee. My wife and I struggled to explain what took place to our children, who themselves witnessed it via social media and by way of our typical news diet at home. Eventually I ended up in a dark mental space and began to feel trapped as my entire family was also working from home in the middle of a global pandemic. My work suffered; I missed meetings, completely neglected deadlines on key projects, and soon had over 250+ unanswered

emails. I reached my lowest point when I read the public statement released by my current institution. I felt like the timing of the statement was equal parts slow and rushed. Specifically, the statement was released on May 31, six days after Floyd's death.

According to my findings however, that release time falls within the same time frame as the statements utilized within this study. I also felt like the statement lacked structure and seemed to have been swiftly composed in order to achieve some sort of public acknowledgement. I also thought the statement lacked any real direct mention of anti-Black racism. It included vague critiques of systemic racism, but no clear language about anti-Black racism and its impact on the work we do at the college. Reading this statement was a watershed moment in my research experience because it caused me to sit and analyze how this statement made me feel. Hindsight informs me that reading the statement from my current employer left me with feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion, which, when combined with the traumatization of witnessing Floyd's murder, ultimately served to retraumatize me in some way. For the record, there was never a question of intention and there is much to appreciate about my current institution's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. I believe it was important to this study, however, for me to provide a reiteration of my personal experience reading the statement at that particular time.

Finally, I found myself in a deep depression. A dark cloud had formed and followed me into the virtual classroom on one of the last days of my doctoral coursework. During an open discussion about Floyd's death and the ensuing civil unrest, I had a moment of breakdown and found myself on the brink of tears in front of the professor and my classmates as I struggled to find a way to express my thoughts. At the time, I was also struggling to determine my research topic, which so many of my classmates had seemed to be able to identify by that time. Just as I

came to the end of my longwinded and emotional remarks, my professor made a suggestion: “you should consider doing a discourse analysis of institutional statements addressing anti-Black racism in 2020.” That marked a turning point in not only my research journey but also my life. Not only had I found a research topic that I could be proud of, I also believe that I found a purposeful way to engage in scholar-activism and fight against anti-Black racism.

As such, I began my dissertation utilizing a critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodology. Here, CDA is understood as a tool that allows people to explore how language is a social action and takes particular interest in the relationship between language, ideology, and power (Fairclough, 2006; Rogers, 2004). From an equity perspective, CDA makes the case that texts, particularly those that are widely circulated, have the power to shape narratives and obscure the complexities of anti-Black racism. Fairclough’s framing of CDA can also be connected to the second central tenet of critical race theory, which challenges White supremacists’ ideology and emphasizes a diversity of thoughts and perspectives. If institutional leaders are to release public statements addressing anti-Black racism with a CRT lens, an understanding of how the language they utilize can serve to either support or suppress marginalized voices is critical.

Statements were collected utilizing the search engines located on the college and university home webpages. The words “George Floyd” was inserted into the search engine, leading to a number of results, most of which included the institutional statement within the first 1-2 links. I began by reading each statement a total of three times. The first reading was a broad stroke where I simply read the statement front to back with no markings. On the second reading, I placed checkmarks on all of the words, phrases, and sentences that caught my attention. Finally, I read it a third time and created notes, highlights, and other markings that would assist

me in the coding process. From there, I analyzed each statement utilizing a coding table, which included the following information:

- Name of the institution
- Number of statements issued
- Institution type and location
- Author (name and position)
- Who is named?
- Who isn't named?
- What terms are used to describe the act?
- Notable words and phrases
- What (if any) actions are named in response to the incident?
- Did the statement mention training?
- Word count

The goal here was to create a table of codes that allowed me to code the statements for specific examples of how they either serve to call out anti-Black racism or obscure White supremacy. For example, the notable words and phrases section led to the emergence of three key message themes: (a) statements of solidarity, (b) denunciation of racism (or some form such as police brutality, White supremacy, etc.), and (c) a declaration of institutional and/or individual values. This was a particularly important section because it provided textual evidence that revealed a messaging pattern that was present in nearly every statement utilized in this study.

Findings from this study were organized according to three key areas: (a) terminology and syntax, (b) the centralization of narratives, and (c) action orientation. The first finding explored the ways in which Floyd's death was referred to throughout the statement. Six institutions indicated that Floyd had "died," "passed," or "lost his life," while 11 statements utilized "the death of George Floyd" as a general reference. Additionally, some statements utilized explicit and descriptive language such as "the horrific killings" and "the unjustified and brutal death." Among the 27 statements analyzed, only four actually stated the words "Black Lives Matter," and none of the statements mentioned Derek Chauvin by name. Additional

findings revealed three key messages which emerged as themes: (a) statements of solidarity, (b) denunciation of racism (or some form such as police brutality, White supremacy, etc.), and (c) a declaration of institutional and/or individual values. In many cases, the author centralized themselves by affirming their own personal experiences, thoughts, and perspectives on racism. The findings reveal a variety of action orientations, or expressions of intended action steps by the institution to mitigate racism in their campus communities. The degree of action-oriented language utilized within the statements analyzed included a wide range of bold and specific to vague and imprecise. A number of statements included encouragements to readers to take certain actions for themselves, which led to a pattern of speech that placed the onus of action onto the reader as opposed to the institution.

Implications

What Does This Mean for Higher Education?

When approaching a research topic, I was on a mission to not only advance the literature but also the practice of engaging in an informed and reformed discourse around race, racism, anti-Black racism, and anti-racism. The reason I believe this was an important and significant factor in my research experience can be summarized by Green and Trent (2005), who assert the following:

The challenge of higher education leadership today is to accept the responsibility of leadership and participation in the construction, development, and advancement of a new narrative and discourse that gives voice to diverse communities that have, for too long, and too frequently, remained invisible (p.102-103).

As a scholar-practitioner, I have accepted the responsibility that Green and Trent speak of, which is to do the work of advancing a new narrative and discourse around issues related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. In this sense, I have attempted to construct and develop a scholarly position that emphasizes textual discourse as a powerful tool that can serve to either elevate or

suppress diverse narratives and voices. In summary, my passion for this work was a significant factor not only choosing a research topic but navigating the research process as well.

What does this mean for me as a higher education professional?

My experience as a Black professional in higher education is relatable to a particular passage in DuBois's (1903) classic, *The Souls of Black Folk*. The book exposed the substantial causes of racism and analyzed the effects that racism has on Black identity. DuBois believed that the laws and society that prevented Black people from achieving equality in a post-slavery America would continue to pose a problem for Black identity (DuBois, 1903). He argued that as a result of this, Blacks and Whites in the US were separated by a color line (DuBois, 1903). DuBois claimed that not only did the color line deny Black people fair access to jobs, education, and opportunity, but it actually weighed so heavily on the *souls* of Black folks that it prevented us from achieving our full potential as human beings. Notably, DuBois wrote about the double consciousness produced by wearing "the veil" (DuBois, 1903). The veil represents the split identity that Blacks feel as we attempt to be both African *and* American in a White society where one identity and one way of life is valued more than the other. DuBois refers to this as "a second sight," which causes Black people to picture themselves within the framework of Whiteness, thus lacking a true self-consciousness (DuBois, 1903). The following quote summarizes this concept:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body. (DuBois, 1903, p.2)

During both the research and writing process, I felt the pull on both sides of my double consciousness, and I consistently found myself in a state of alternate identities. On one side, an

individual Black man with my own thoughts and perspectives, critically analyzing the statements from the lens of my own personal identity. The other side, a researcher who needed to remain objective and impartial throughout the process. It was a constant shift from self-to-system-back to self.

For example, while drafting the implications for practice, I had to think critically about which identity guided my thought process. I had to ask myself if I was making these recommendations out of my own self-interest as a Black man or as a Black professional in higher education. Then, I had to wrestle with the idea of a median. Could it be possible to approach this study as both a Black man and a Black professional in higher education? Such a question is critical for me and those like me who aspire to do high-level equity work in higher education. DuBois's (1903) masterpiece serves as a wonderful source of inspiration for a scholarly reflection to a study of this kind.? Moreover, I can appreciate his thoughts around the concept of "two-ness" and how Black people are, even in academic research, socialized to choose one or the other. Toni Morrison (1992) once said, "In this country, American means White. Everybody else has to hyphenate." This quote is powerful because it gets at the heart of what many Black people in higher education experience on a daily basis. A hyphenated existence that causes one to try to exist in the space between the African and the American. This ideology impacted my research.

What I learned From this Research Project

At the time of this writing, the national discourse around anti-Black racism has shifted and evolved into other subjects and no longer dominates the mainstream media as it did in 2020. However, the public discourse around race and racism in higher education is perhaps more prevalent than ever both in research and organizational practice. Moreover, there is an unfortunate reality that Floyd's murder is not an anomaly. At some point, we will all be

reconfronted with another heinous act of anti-Black racism, which ultimately means that there will remain a need to advance the literature on the subject matter. Moving forward, I will be more cautious about how I approach research from an emotional standpoint. Simply stated, I was not prepared for the emotional toll this experience would take on me. Words cannot describe the intense pain that accompanied me throughout this process. I paid an emotional toll with each statement I read, re-read, coded, and analyzed. By the end of the data analysis period, I was spiritually, mentally, and emotionally drained. What I believe to be true is that for me, this wasn't just empirical research, but emotional research as well. In a sermon entitled "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," King (1963) classifies this convergence as a balance of opposites. He encourages Black people to bring together toughmindedness and tenderheartedness, if we are to move creatively toward the goal of freedom and justice (King, 1963). As such, when approaching future research, I will be more honest with myself about the internal emotional work that will need to be done while also taking into account the mental fortitude needed in order to persevere through the rigors of academic research.

Future Research

Finally, in future research, I believe it would be valuable to survey students, faculty, and staff on their views, perceptions, and reactions to their institution's statement addressing anti-Black racism. I believe a research topic of this kind would advance the literature by adding the element of human subjects to the research question. Participants could express their thoughts and perspectives and offer additional insight to the discourse around how institutional statements serve to elevate or suppress marginalized narratives and voices. Future research could also include exploring progress made on identified action steps that were listed in each statement. As mentioned in the discussion around action orientation, some statements included specific actions

that can be followed up on. Future research could include interviews with institutional leaders to get updated information on where progress was made on stated action steps. Finally, future research could include adding the author's perspective to the literature. Institutional leaders responsible for authoring and releasing an institutional statement addressing anti-Black racism could be surveyed to gain a sense of their experiences in composing the statement and the ways in which they navigated the public response. These added research questions could advance the literature and discourse around how institutions of higher education respond to anti-Black racism.

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