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The Impact of Bureaucracy, Power, and Structure on the Black Graduate Student Experience

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THE IMPACT OF BUREAUCRACY, POWER, AND STRUCTURE ON THE

BLACK GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Communication

By

Demetria Scherell Green

May 2019

THE IMPACT OF BUREAUCRACY, POWER, AND STRUCTURE ON THE BLACK GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Communication

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Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis utilizes muted group theory to understand the impact bureaucratic structure has on Black graduate students at predominantly white institutions. Muted group theory is used to inform individuals of the impact power functions have on both verbal and nonverbal communication. The premises of the theory focus on the lack of underrepresented voices present in policies, structures, and organizations. In order to gain clarity on the experiences of Black graduate students in particular, the use of qualitative data gathering provided unique insights to answer the research questions guiding this study. A focus group was first used to generate key themes, examples, and definitions; interviews were then used to enhance understanding of participant experiences. First, the research was able to gain insight on perceptions of bureaucratic structure in a university setting. These perceptions included both positive and negative perceptions. The positive perceptions included rationalizing the bureaucratic structure, adequate representation, and advisor support. The negative perceptions included: structural exclusion, disingenuous diversity efforts, and white privilege. The discussion of perceptions about bureaucratic structure in a university ends with the comparison of the Historically Black College or University experience and the Predominantly white Institution experience. The second key finding of this research focuses on the coping mechanisms utilized by Black graduate students who find themselves as muted members of the university's bureaucratic structure. These coping mechanisms include: role performance, finding white allies, and creating participant dissent. The findings in this research indicates the importance of representation in bureaucratic structures and the need for more genuine actions by those in positions of power.

KEYWORDS: muted group theory, Black graduate students, bureaucracy, power, structure, diversity, representation, inclusion, disingenuous diversity efforts, spokesperson

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GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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A Master's Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College
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May 2019

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To my beloved father, it is my hope that you are proud. Although you are not here with me physically you will forever live in my heart. Gone too soon, but never forgotten.

I dedicate this thesis to Demetris D. Green.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Graduate school teaches you some things. I have learned what classes challenge me the most and what subjects interest me the most, but I have also learned the importance of navigating the hidden structures of the university in order to succeed. In fact, graduate school seems to have taught me that you have to be strategic about every move you make and every utterance that comes out of your mouth in order to succeed. As a Black graduate student, I am blessed to have made connections and developed myself not only academically but emotionally as well. However, the constant battle of finding a space to enjoy the elements of my authentic self while achieving academic success is a phenomenon that has captured my attention while researching about the Black graduate student experience. The typical university structure in the United States embodies bureaucracy and the rigidity of that structure has become even more apparent to me in my graduate school career. My own experiences and my interest in organizations and hierarchical structures led me to research the Black graduate student population specifically.

Much like colleges and universities, many organizations that exist today have an established set of rules and policies that govern the organization. These rules articulate the work processes and manage the daily operations performed by organizational participants. Organizations such as this follow a rigid structure of repetitive tasks and spheres of influence are limited to a select few; this structure is known as bureaucracy. The spheres of influence are bound by a normative hierarchy and reinforced by patterns of status, power, communication, rewards, and sanctions (Hansen, 1975). The range of organizations and corporations participating in the rigid structure of bureaucracy include government agencies, military, health care organizations, and many others.

The university setting serves as a fitting model of bureaucratic structure. Universities are establishments tasked with preparing individuals within their chosen field of study. Each academic unit generally follows a rigid structure in order to create a sense of organization and order for students, faculty, and staff. Following a specific format ensures that all individuals are taught foundational skills and theoretical concepts specific to their chosen field. Although fields of study are aligned clearly and follow specific course trajectories, individuals enrolling into these courses come from diverse backgrounds. Students may vary in gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, etc. However, the typical bureaucratic structure does not take into account such diversity among organizational constituents. As such, the current study focuses primarily on the demographic of race and explores the experiences of Black graduate students within the university structure.

When enrolling into university classes, students are given the freedom to choose from a pool of classes specific to their field of study. The decision making and procedural system at universities is meant to enhance the experiences for everyone. University policies, programs, procedures, and regulations exist to guide administrators, faculty, staff, and students to make the right decisions and make every individual feel safe and secure (Parlar & Cansoy, 2017). Although there is a certain sense of freedom among decision making, there is also a clear structure of power being implemented and many are acutely aware of that system. Students are typically required to enroll in certain courses based on what is deemed by the program to be a correct fit for their interest (e.g. general education courses and courses designated for a specific major). Graduate students are tasked with similar conditions in coursework and then expected to fulfill certain requirements in order to showcase their abilities in obtaining advanced level degrees (e.g. completing a professional project, seminar paper, or thesis).

The bureaucratic structure of a university accentuates the importance of the hierarchy and establishes a chain of command. Bureaucracy is a term coined by Max Weber in the early 20th century to describe a traditional form of organizing: subordinates are to follow a normative structure and adhere to the rules and regulations of the leadership (Mansfield, 1973). The implementation of clear rules was meant to eliminate unfair treatment and bias (Weber, 1924, 1978). The modern concept of bureaucracy suggests that the authority structure is best described as a balance of power (Hansen, 1975).

Although the intent is to balance power within a hierarchy, underrepresented groups are often not allotted the same amount of power as members of the majority. Every process from enrolling into a university to completing a degree is indicative of bureaucratic structure. Individuals are taught to reinforce this structure and to operate within it in order to succeed. Bureaucracies often oppress marginalized people and maintain a power structure that lasts for decades (Ferguson, 1984). The system does not emphasize the importance of creativity and difference, although many organizations oversee a diverse group of individuals. Class, education, and professional roles reinforce power inequities in organizations (Gimlin, 1996). This research looks to evaluate the function of difference by exploring the influence of power and structure within a bureaucracy.

The implementation of initiatives surrounding diverse groups of individuals at the university level has generated much conversation and action. Although this has taken place, the power structure in universities typically remains unchanged with members of majority groups holding most positions of power and, therefore, creating policy. Underrepresented groups need to be accounted for in order to balance power more effectively. Bureaucracy enforces the importance of power and often operates in ways that keeps the power structure unbalanced, thus

operating in direct opposition to its original intent. This research will look to explore the bureaucratic structure in the university setting and analyze the impact different power structures have on a key underrepresented group (Black graduate students) by utilizing muted group theory premises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Elements of bureaucracy in existing organizational literature will be explored. This review includes what the concept of bureaucracy encompasses as well as the basic premises of the bureaucratic structure in organizations. The role that power plays in bureaucracy is important; therefore, the different components of power are defined. A basic understanding of the structure and the key elements involved is needed to fully understand the intersection of bureaucracy and muted power. Lastly, the exploration of muted group theory and the areas of intersection it has within the elements of bureaucracy will be covered in the theoretical perspective component.

Bureaucratic Structure

The bureaucratic structure in organizations relates to the separation of powers and the determination of who has authority (Mansfield, 1973). Bureaucracy was a system introduced by Max Weber emphasizing the importance of rules and the enforcement of policy. Within a bureaucracy, rules are clearly defined and outlined in order to further reinforce a chain of command. Weber (1947) identified rules, standards, and systematic procedures as enabling organizational activities to be oriented towards goals and objectives. Lower departments are assumed to understand the control and the supervision of a higher one; these rules and regulations are all recorded in writing (Weber, 1947).

Rules and regulations are put forth to ensure organizational adaptation to environmental needs. Weber's writings focused on large organizations; he saw the need for them to work in machine-like precision and highly emphasized the promotion of administrative workers rather

than production workers (Weber, 1947). In other words, Weber looked to develop certain

workers in order to obtain positions in which they were capable of organizing and synthesizing

information. Rules were intended to eliminate bias and ensure a process beneficial for all of

those involved within it (Weber, 1947). This intent means that all individuals were allotted the

same opportunity to advance if they possessed the skill set. The rules did not allow for

derailment of the policies set by rigid division and were clearly defined and implemented.

The development of the bureaucratic structure led to Weber's formulation of ten key

principles emphasizing how work was to be administered. These principles served as a guide for

organizations implementing a bureaucratic approach (Weber, 1924/1978):

(1) There are fixed and official jurisdictional areas which are generally ordered by rules.

(2) Organizations have strict hierarchy based on authority.

(3) Work should be clearly defined by rules and separated among workers based on competence.

(4) Employees freely enter contractual relationships.

(5) Employees are appointed to positions based on technical qualifications.

(6) They receive fixed salaries according to rank in hierarchy.

(7) The workplace should be primary occupation.

(8) The workplace should be a career with promotion opportunities according to achievement and/or seniority.

(9) The employee is not the owner.

(10) The employee is subject to strict, systematic discipline and control. (Kramer & Bisel, 2017, p.11)

In a typical university setting, the ways in which these principles are enforced is

evidenced by several policies and procedures. (1) Fixed and official jurisdiction ordered by rules

clearly identifies the job titles for those within an organization. Therefore, individuals are aware of who possesses authority and dominion over certain job related tasks. For example, in a university setting academic units are delineated by colleges, schools, and/or departments to indicate who is responsible for delivering which content areas. (2) Organizations follow a strict hierarchy, established by clear line of authority. When fulfilling their job duties, members know to whom they report. For example, a departmental administrative assistant may report to the department head to get clarity on a specific process or to receive the authority to proceed with a specific task. (3) Work should be clearly defined by rules. Faculty, staff, and students within a university have different tasks to fulfill, although there may be some overlap. For example, the level of education a professor has dictates what types of courses they are allowed to teach. Students receive syllabi clearly defining what is expected and required for their courses. (4) Employees freely enter the agreements of the university and are agreeing to follow policy when accepting employment. Students enroll into a university generally aware of the requirements to obtain a degree. Graduate students in particular often enter into a unique type of agreement like an assistantship that dictates the details of the relationship between the graduate student and their graduate program. (5) Technical qualifications are manifest through universities. When hiring faculty and staff, individuals must possess the required degree and/or skills to obtain the position. Students also are required to meet certain standards to be accepted into a degree program and enroll into a university. (6) Salaries are determined by experience and the amount of education acquired. (7) The workplace should be the primary occupation; individuals are expected to have a vested interest in their field and the advancement of their place of employment. For example, in typical university settings, certain faculty are hired as tenure eligible and encouraged to work toward tenure by establishing a record of focused research in their specific field. (8) The

bureaucratic notion that the workplace should be a career with promotion opportunities emphasizes the importance of faculty publishing or receiving awards or of staff seeking advanced education or certification to become eligible for promotions. (9) Employees are not owners in university settings, which demonstrates the clear separation of power between an employee and an employer. (10) Administrators are expected to conduct university business in a controlled manner regulated by specific guidelines. Faculty are also expected to inform students about specific information and practices that will guide a course. Employees at all levels are subject to strict and systematic discipline and control. Individuals are required to adhere to and reinforce policies and rules put forth by the university. Students are also influenced by this principle based on classroom structure which is constantly being reinforced by faculty members. These general examples of the implementation of bureaucracy in universities are not limited to what is listed above. However, they indicate the overarching presence of bureaucratic principles in university life, not the least of which is the importance of authority.

Weber (1947) defined authority as the notion that commands with specific content will be obeyed by a group of constituents. University administrators possess a level of authority over the student experience as well as the faculty and staff experience. Weber (1947) identifies three different forms of authority within a bureaucracy. First, traditional authority stems from the historically divine rulings of kings and queens. There is a reliance on tradition and order predetermined by those who have come before. Second, charismatic authority is possessed by those who inspire great loyalty and confidence among others. This type of authority attracts a huge following based on the faith followers have in leadership capabilities. Finally, legal rational authority is based on a belief in the supremacy of law (Weber, 1947). Laws and rules influence

decisions and serve as a framework to enact established procedures on the basis of the rules set by previous decisions.

If implemented unethically, authority can be difficult to overcome and overturn. The rigid structure of bureaucracy can lead to an unequal divide of power which perpetuates the cycle of having the same individuals in control year after year. This practice of rigid hierarchy leads to the formation of exclusion and potential harm to all of those involved. Through the years of research on this topic, pragmatic questions have been raised about the validity of the rational bureaucracy model, since bureaucracies are run by individuals who have their own perspectives, orientations, culture, and way of performing tasks (Blau & Scott, 1962; Ivanko, 2012; Jorgensen, 2012). Weber's original intent for bureaucracy was to enhance transparency, fairness, and justice of organizations given that decisions were made based on rules that had previously been established (Kramer & Bisel, 2017). Weber also predicted that policies rooted in bureaucracy would lead to difficult situations that revealed the need for adjustment in policy to respond to the new needs of those involved; however, such adjustments are difficult to make once bureaucratic structures are in place (Kramer & Bisel, 2017). Weber (1947) identified the concept as "the iron cage," which created bondage to a system of control and inefficiency.

Power

Power is important within bureaucracies because those who are higher in the structure possess the power to make decisions on behalf of those who are lower in the structure. Power and bureaucracy are intertwined; one person or a small group of people typically possess the authority to shape and form policies and procedures to which all organizational members must adhere. Having a clear line of power within an organization can be beneficial. However, deep

structure power can negatively impact those in an organization if used incorrectly. The models of structures used in organizations today have seldom been modified to fit the needs of all. With the exploration of power, trends emerge which indicate how power serves to further disenfranchise underrepresented group members.

Mumby (2001) defined power as "the production and reproduction of, resistance to, or transformation of relatively fixed structures of communication and meaning that support the interest of some organization members over others" (p.587). Power is produced and reproduced through a system that requires individuals to participate within the system as well as adhere to the guidelines. There is an interdependence of organizational members that influences the communication which establishes power between individuals (Mumby, 2001). For example, graduate students who communicate with their advisors and professors about elements of graduate school (taking specific classes, attending events, etc.) possess less power given their place in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the university. Meres et al, (2004) states that those in power maintain their power, consciously or unconsciously, by controlling discourse and the meanings generated from the discourse. From this perspective, bureaucracy creates overt surface level power and reinforces covert deep structured power as new rules and policies are being created by those who possess power. This phenomenon is cycled through organizations, which makes it harder for policy change to take place.

Surface Level Power. Surface level power is power that is easily identified by those in the organization. This form of power can be exhibited in routine communication interactions in organizations (French & Raven, 1959). Different forms of surface level power positively or negatively influence cognitive and affective learning, perception of credibility, and motivation (Dannels, 2014). For example, graduate students are influenced by this level of power—

receiving information from different individuals within a program promote different responses. A reference or suggestion from a department head versus an assistant professor is interpreted differently and determines how a graduate student will respond to the information.

French and Raven (1959) identified power as the ability to alter another person in some way. Within the university setting, power is exerted by instructors and professors who in turn are given regulations put forth by administration. French and Raven (1959) further develop five types of surface power along with characteristics used to identify each unique type. This typology includes reward, coercive, legitimate, expert, and referent power.

(1) Reward power is based on incentives attained from behaving or thinking in a desired manner. Students in the classroom grant this power to instructors when they perceive that they receive rewards in the form of grades.

(2) Coercive power involves threatening or punishing individuals who do not perform a desired task. Punishment is enforced and consequences follow if tasks are not completed by students (e.g., not meeting GPA requirements within graduate programs and losing assistantships as a result).

(3) Legitimate power is related to a specific role or position. Graduate students traditionally respect power that is given to advisors in decision making processes due to their titles and position within the university hierarchy.

(4) Expert power is based on the knowledge one possesses rather than their position. Different professors within a department may specialize or have a specific emphasis, and therefore would be deemed as an expert in their special research focus.

(5) Referent power is based on an individual who identifies strongly with another person or group. This bond is due to the embodiment of shared behaviors and attitudes of the person or group (French & Raven, 1959). Graduate students who may share common interests with professors and therefore building connections, due to similarities in a variety of areas.

Reward, coercive, and legitimate power bases are known as positional power because of the tendency to be connected to organizational authority (French & Raven, 1959).Expert and referent power are known as personal power because the power is attributed to the individual, whether or not they have reached high organizational authority and status (French & Raven,

1959).Those in power tend to form clusters of associations and attributions in actual practice (French & Raven, 1959). The clusters formed ensure that certain types of people obtain and retain positions of power in organizational settings.

Deep Structured Power. Deep structured power is difficult to observe and is embedded in the culture of an organization (Mumby, 1987). The structure of organizational power reinforces bureaucracy and contributes to the formation of muted groups (discussed in detail below). Many groups of individuals become content with the deep structured power system due to familiarity. If an individual is exposed to one system their entire life, the system becomes the standard or status quo, and therefore it becomes more difficult to invoke change. This structure creates disadvantages for some while creating advantages for others (Mumby, 1987). For example, a group of individuals may benefit from a specific person being in power, while others may suffer. Power is achieved by establishing an organization's "mode of rationality" through controlling the deep structured rules of an organization (Mumby, 1987). A framework presented by Clegg (1975) illustrates how structures of domination can become embedded "naturally" and "rationally" in an organization. The element of structural domination being embedded into frameworks is illustrated in the types of classes required within programs. Different programs may have policies and guidelines to follow about certain practices that may be rooted in organizational structure. Therefore, the lack of questioning those existing policies is due to reinforcement of those behaviors. For example, graduate students typically do not question the amount of credit hours required within a program, but instead structure their classes based on guidelines created. Deep structure power can go unnoticed by the subordinates, but is instead used as a tactic by those who possess the most power.

The process of organizing is crucial to the vested interest of different groups within an organization (Mumby, 1987). Organizations are made up of different and competing values and belief systems that embody the interest of different groups; the groups with the most power will be those that are best equipped to integrate their claims into the structuring of the organization (Mumby, 1987). This structuring means that those who are highly involved and identified with the organization are more likely to have the most power due to their views aligning more with established policy.

Deep structured power can be further understood by the six characteristics of communication within deep structured power (Mumby, 1987). The first characteristic of deep structured power is that communication represents sectional interests as universal (Mumby, 1987). This characteristic includes the assumption that what works for one group of individuals will work for another group of individuals. Tensions are created between groups and individuals because of this assumption, which leads to the formation of out groups and cliques beginning to form.

The second characteristic of deep structure power in organizations is that communication denies or transmutes contradictions (Mumby, 1987). Anything that goes against the norm of an organization is not validated. This practice leads to silenced voices and problems unresolved. Muted voices perpetuate the silence within an organization and may make individuals feel like outcasts. The lack of enforcement or creation of policy to address silencing has an impact on individuals who identify with underrepresented groups.

The third characteristic of deep structured power is that communication naturalizes and reifies the present (Mumby, 1987). Policy set forth is without flaw and does not need to be modified, according to those in power. The tenth principle of bureaucracy involves obeying strict

rules being enforced by those who are in power. The positions of power are likely to stay the same; therefore, the cycle of hiring people who fit the roles of past descriptions leads to the lack of diversity in certain positions, because the same types of people are getting hired.

The fourth characteristic is the systematic distortion of communication (Mumby, 1987). This concept involves individuals failing to recognize that they are deceiving themselves through their communication. Deceit through communication takes place when individuals are aware of downfalls within a structure and choose to ignore it in order to advance. Organizational members' communication is often misunderstood or misrepresented by those in power. These misunderstanding leads to the reinforcement of power systems.

Finally, hegemonic participation describes the process of reinforcing the dominant ideology. In other words, the ideas of those who are in power are reinforced. The fourth principle of bureaucracy is comprised of employees freely entering into contractual agreements within the organization. Although an individual is aware of the structure taking place, there is a conscious effort to continue to participate in that structure for a variety of reasons such as maintaining employment, achieving status, seeking self-fulfillment, or providing a means of survival (Gramsci, 1973).

Whether it be surface level or deep structured power, Dannels (2014) asserts the importance of understanding the ways in which power and authority are enacted, because those enactments have the potential to resist, reproduce, or change existing power structures produced throughout the organizational setting. Relatedly, Deetz (1992) described the process of distorting or muting some people as well as eliminating some types of claims through discourse. Therefore, one can gather that policies created by those in power or positions of authority may have excluded subordinate groups. Additionally, critical communication pedagogy acknowledges the

social and cultural forces present in all power negotiations (Dannels, 2014). Power used

incorrectly can lead to the oppression of subordinate groups, a phenomenon addressed by muted

group theory.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: MUTED GROUP THEORY

The importance of being heard is a fundamental feature in communication. Many people will talk, but only few will listen. Communication is denoted as a discursive action that creates, enacts, and reproduces power structures that privilege certain groups over others (Giddens, 1979). In this way, discourse has the power to oppress as well as liberate people (Giddens, 1979). In society today and in most organizations, some can be heard through a wide scope of platforms while others have a narrower scope through which they are given voice. Ardener (1975) suggests that a social hierarchy exists in every society that privileges one group over others. The idea of privileging one group over others is not the basis of one group being innately superior to others, but instead one group possessing dominant power over other groups (Orbe, 1998).

Orbe (1998) argues that the majority of communication research efforts focused on exploring cultural impacts often falls short due to the extensive focus on dominant group members. The goal in cultural research should be focusing on a specific culture and analyzing multiple perspectives based in the context of that culture. Instead, findings have typically used the thoughts and perceptions of a dominant cultural group as the foundation of such research. Utilizing the dominant culture further reinforces that dominant power. This process also aligns with the idea of marginalized people belonging to muted groups due to the lack of their lived experiences being represented in dominant structures. Due to the lack of representation of certain groups, there is an innate need to conform in order to be understood when in communication with dominant group members i.e. code switching. Muted group theory points out problems within the status quo that enable the silencing of underrepresented groups and offers ways to address the issue (West & Turner, 2010).

Muted group theory provides a useful framework for recognizing the relationship between power and muted voices (Meares, Oetzel, Torres, Derkacs, & Ginossar, 2004). This theory has been utilized to help inform individuals about the impact power functions have in verbal and nonverbal communication patterns (Kramarae, 2005). In the 1970s, anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener observed that ethnographers were studying leaders of cultures who were male and generalizing their thoughts and perceptions as a representation of the collective group (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). The perspectives of women, children, and other groups were not considered; these groups were without voice due to the cultural hierarchy (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014; Ardener 1974; Ardener, 1978, 2005). Ardener (1975) suggested that women may have not been given appropriate attention by traditional anthropologists due to most of the researchers viewing them as under the influence of the dominant, male systems of perspectives. Women were labeled as being unable to take interviews seriously and not possessing the level of maturity necessary to validate the message they were presenting to anthropologists (Ardener, 1975).

Once these observations have been made regarding muted groups, questions are derived concerning equal participation within society and how discourse is encoded or understood (Ardener, 2005). According to the theory, the questioning of existing policies should be in response to the lack of or misrepresentation of subordinate groups within an organization. Ardener (2005) emphasized that muting by dominant groups through control of dominant discourse is reinforced through and engrained in many different social spaces. These spaces include prominent organizations emphasizing a structure of power while many voices go unnoticed or unheard. For example, graduate students who feel as if they are outnumbered and are unable to find common ground with majority group members might be silenced in university

settings. The idea of being silenced is reinforced with the current policies, set forth by majority group members at a university.

Muted group theory focuses attention on the lack of voice in underrepresented groups, as well as resistance and silencing (Kramarae, 1981). There are four main premises that are derived from muted group theory:

(1) Members from different groups have different experiences which result in their different perceptions of the world. Experiences are often interpreted differently for them by others within an organization (Kramarae, 2005).

(2) Each society privileges some groups over others (E. Ardener, 1978; S. Ardener, 1975, 1978). That privilege is enacted when those in power determine the dominant discourse of what society deems is appropriate (Meares, et. al, 2004). There are fewer opportunities for subordinate groups to voice how they feel or to challenge the policies put forth.

(3) The attempt to get concerns recognized in the public realm are only conveyed when communication from muted groups is the same as the dominant discourse (Meares, et. al, 2004). Members are expected to adjust their communication style to be heard by those who are a part of the dominant discourse.

(4) Resistance and change are possible under certain restrictions (Meares, et. al, 2004). This premise emphasizes the importance of resistance. The set back is that, although muted members have a lot to say, there is little power to speak up without encountering trouble from those who are in power (Kramarae, 2005).

There are a variety of organizational norms that reinforce the act of silencing muted groups. Houston and Kramarae (1991) reflected on the experiences of silenced women by examining their personal interactions with students. Women's silence is accepted in many ways that often go unnoticed by society (Houston & Kramarae, 1991). The same phenomenon of unnoticed silence occurs within other groups as well. Within the context of Black individuals, for example, their communication is subjected to mass overgeneralization due to the lack of developed knowledge bases or other dimensions of the Black experience (Orbe, 1995).

Inclusivity in Research

A variety of approaches to research are crucial to consider when attempting to gain insight into the "deep structures" of power (Pennington, 1979) that inform intercultural communication and muted group experiences. Theory building from a diverse perspective contributes insight into these communication processes (Moon, 1996). Thus, it is important to note that Orbe (1994) emphasized that not only women, but any group outside of the mainstream is likely to be muted. The original focus in muted group theory addressed muting based on gender, but as research continues to progress, the focused has shifted to exploring muted groups based on ethnicity, persons with disabilities, and others (Meares, et. al, 2004). Exploring muteness through the lenses of different groups broadens the horizon of the theory by including more individuals and aids in identifying the impact that power structures have on different groups.

One of the limitations of existing literature on Black communication in particular is that traditional empirical methodological frameworks are rooted in Eurocentrism (Gonzalez, Houston, & Chen, 1994). These limited frameworks look to apply arbitrary and artificial situations to the nature of the studies involving Black individuals (Orbe, 1995). Many of the findings hide the true voices of Black individuals and form frameworks created by European American researchers (Skinner, 1982). Naming this lack of inclusivity within research is not to criticize researchers' use of deductive reasoning, but instead to encourage the formulation of new ways of including the voices of Black individuals within scholarly research (Orbe, 1995). Christian (1988) contends that the idea of theorizing by people of color through narrative forms differs from the traditional, Western theoretical frameworks. The experiences and voices of

Black individuals are largely absent from research, resulting in a literature that does not portray an accurate depiction of the Black experience.

Hegemony

The process of silencing groups and constructing power is facilitated through coercion and hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony is particularly important to include within studies of organizational communication because of the ways in which dominant concerns become the primary focus within an organization (Meares, et. al, 2004). Hegemony emphasizes dominance by one specific group as their wants and needs supersede the wants and needs of others. Focusing primarily on the dominant culture in communication leads to the concerns of the dominant culture being prioritized over others and reinforces the normalization of injustices faced by muted groups (Meares, et. al, 2004). Issues of power and hegemony are reflected in how organizational members communicate or avoid mistreatment as well as whether they have a voice in the organization (Clair, 1998).

Taylor and Conrad (1992) found that organizational structures such as bureaucracy contribute to the practices of privilege and abandonment. Institutional silencing is not limited to specific practices (Clair, 1998). Practices vary across different organizations; therefore, there is not one solidified practice that leads to silencing. Practices are dependent on the organization, and a practice that silences groups in one organization may not have the same result in another. Whether strategic or intentional, the element of ambiguity has the ability to allow privileged groups to remain in power, especially within an organizational setting (Meares, et. al, 2004). When members in position of power use ambiguity to remain in power, other members within

the organization who identify with muted groups remain deprived of the ability to challenge procedures and their position as inferior is then reinforced (Meares, et. al, 2004).

Institutions individually contribute to the collective silencing of marginalized members of society and organizations. As an example of the concept of silencing marginalized groups, certain educational systems are used to reinforce dominant worldviews (Deetz, 1992; Foucault, 1976). The United States' school system is intended to educate the young and prepare students for what is to come after the completion of school (Clair, 1998). However, the work of Willis (1977) emphasizes how the school system reinforces the status quo and perpetuates a system of structure that individuals from underrepresented groups are to follow in order to obtain working class jobs. Clair (1998) asserts that research on the educational system is only beginning to uncover a variety of sexist, racist, and homophobic practices.

Clair (1998) views hegemony as a complex feature highlighting how some groups are privileged through communication while others are transferred to the margins. Marginalized groups have the capabilities to reinforce these structures by participating in the hegemonic process. Participation in these processes by members of muted groups is not always readily identified and may serve as a mechanism to conform in order to be understood and/or recognized by dominant group members. For example, in her work on the framing of sexual harassment, Clair (1998) found that the way in which women spoke about sexual harassment serves to isolate communication about the issue. Although Clair focused on sexual harassment, the idea of silencing occurs in a variety of behaviors. Frames keeping harassment out of public discourse included viewing individual concerns as less important than organizational concerns (Meares, et. al, 2004), a characteristic which is well connected to the deep structure power apparent in bureaucratic organizations.

One of the limitations of this work is the lack of understanding in the process of silencing in other contexts (Meares, et. al, 2004). The focus is mainly in the context of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and communicating about sexuality and sexual topics (Meares, et. al, 2004). Clair's (1998) work recognizes the rationalizations that silence communication about the topic of sexual harassment but fails to consider how some stories are privileged over others (Meares, et. al, 2004). The importance of the story is determined by culture; therefore, some stories are prioritized over others. Clair's work highlights the verbal and nonverbal communication of experiences, but does not explain how experiences are impacted by cultural membership while others are privileged (Meares, et. al, 2004). As a result, the research excludes information about how the verbal and nonverbal communication differs between cultures.

Race-Related Muteness

Hendrix and Wilson (2014) analyzed notable absences within in research when focusing on the experiences of people of color. The authors then explored their experiences using both muted group theory and standpoint theory. They located trends within the research and found ways in which the experiences of people of color were unrecognized and excluded from research. The major themes identified in the research included information about teacher/instruction-to-student communication, public speaking, technology, and identity (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014).

When viewing this research from the lens of muted group theory, they were able to formulate three key principles:

(1) Whitescholars and scholars of color may perceive the world differently. This
    difference is due in part to standards differing between the two groups. A scholar of

color may not be held to the same regard as a white scholar (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014).

(2) White scholars enact power politically, which perpetuates their power and reinforces the current systems (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). This principle can be modeled through the African-American female experience within the academic profession (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). Strides have taken place to change the dynamic, but they remain ignored or muted in most cases (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). This reinforces the notion of having a position, but not a position that will earn notoriety in the field (Davis, 1999).

(3) Scholars of all races interested in studying the impact of race must convert their focus to match the mainstream research focus in order to be heard (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). Converting to mainstream research would potentially increase the likelihood of work being recognized. When research does not match the current trend, the research has the potential to be viewed as obsolete or a loss cause.

From these principles, research has proven that subordinate groups do not possess an equal amount of freedom in comparison to dominant groups (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). Based on the findings, one can infer that the dominant group prefers race-neutral research addressing a variety of elements but fails to address the aspect of perspective taking (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). In other words, dominant group members intentionally ignore different perspectives when presenting information in race-neutral research. More ideas and experiences need to be included within research to represent those differences that occur. Orbe and Allen (2008) perpetuate the idea of white scholarship ignoring the element of race and instead focusing on the elements as having no race, because that is the dominant perspective. Hendrix (2005) emphasized that there are double standards in conducting race-related research. There is a notion that people of color are not able to be objective when studying race (Hendrix, 2005). Furthermore, white scholars who study race are muted due to their interests in race (Hendrix, 2005). Overall, race does not receive mainstream attention in research, but instead is ignored or relegated to the sidelines. This lack of representation in research further reinforces the idea of race-related muteness.

Black Communication

In academic research, the Black community is often viewed as sharing an ethnic culture, but diversity exists within that culture (Orbe, 1995). Much of the existing research focuses on contrasting Black and European American communication, which has led to a lack of diversity seeking when exploring the communication of Black individuals (Orbe, 1995). Communication research has found that culture plays an important role in how people experience communication (Orbe, 1995). Miscommunication between different groups is likely to take place because of these cultural differences that influence communication. Research has looked to identify potential tensions involved in interethnic interaction (Orbe, 1995). Due to experiences and perceptions differing between groups, what makes sense to one group may be misunderstood by another group.

Several issues have emerged as important to Black individuals: stereotyping, acceptance, emotional expressiveness, authenticity, understanding, goal attainment, and powerlessness (Orbe, 1995). Hecht, Ribeau, and Alberts (1989) proposed two contributions to improve the interactions between Black and European Americans. The first involved identifying issues that need to be addressed (Hecht et al., 1989). Instances may occur when issues are known to both groups, but failure to recognize the issue leads to avoidance. The idea of avoiding the situation can then lend to the formation of barriers which inhibits communication between groups. Second, improvement strategies need to be implemented in order to improve interactions (Hecht et al., 1989). These strategies include being more inclusive in hiring practices and encouraging cultural complexity.

The literature has not been clear on a way to answer how Black individuals communicate as a diverse group (Orbe, 1995). Orbe (1995) focuses on communication between Black

individuals between one another, interethnic communication, and how communication differs on the basis of the individual. Researching the Black experience has been generalized throughout research as one pattern and one phenomenon. However, Black individual's communication is complex and includes a variety of elements. For instance, research describing Black communication is presented with little regard to the impact of gender (Staples, 1982). Historically, the lived experiences of Black women have remained largely invisible within research in comparison to describing European women or Black male communication (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982).

Houston and Kramarae (1991) assert that, during normal conversations and public discussions, white women have been seen as denying, negating, and rendering the Black experience of womanhood or redefining their experiences within the terms of white women. As one of the original premises of muted group theory focused on the fact that women collectively were subjected to muteness, the research presented above illustrates the point that hierarchy is present even within oppression. This hierarchy means that women of different ethnicities have encountered different levels of oppression, causing experiences of muteness to vary across culture. More research should focus on addressing these issues as well as emphasizing how the communication practices of subgroups differ within a specific group of individuals. Muted group theory provides an excellent theoretical framework for studying Black communication in a variety of contexts.

Muted group theory resonates with many individuals and specifically targets groups of people who are marginalized. Although the original theory explicitly focused on communication between women and men, there has been implementation of the theory across multiple groups through research. This paper will further explore the Black graduate student experience of

muteness, particularly in the context of bureaucratic structures like universities. The emphasis on silence in such contexts is concerned with what people say, when they speak, and what mode in which they speak (Ardener, 2005). Thus, muted group theory aligns with both the bureaucratic structure and power.

Principles and premises of the theory are also able to intersect with key features of bureaucracy. One key feature of bureaucracy emphasizes the importance of hierarchy and champions rules set forth by leadership. This power structure considers the dominant culture as the foundation of rulemaking; therefore, the consideration of other perspectives is often excluded. Muted group status is not fixed; it is constantly reinforced, augmented, or challenged (Orbe, 1998). Muted group theory suggests that people attached or assigned to underrepresented groups may have a lot to say, but tend to have relatively little power to say it (Kramarae, 2005).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given what is known about bureaucratic structures and muted groups, it is likely that existing organizations following this structure may be knowingly or unknowingly contributing to the silencing of certain constituents. As such, this study seeks to provide a better understanding of a specific muted group (Black graduate students) in a particularly bureaucratic type of organization (a university) by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Black graduate students perceive and process components of their university's bureaucratic structure?

RQ2: In what ways if at all, do Black graduate students cope with being members of a muted group within the bureaucratic structure of the university?

METHOD

This research focuses on concerns of inclusion among diverse and underrepresented constituents in a bureaucratic university. Specifically, this interpretive research looks to examine the influence that power has on the bureaucratic structure of a university by gaining a perspective from Black graduate students. This process will allow for participants to recall their own experiences through the utilization of retrospective sense making (Weick, 1995), which is well suited for understanding how individuals experience organizational life.

Participants

The participants in the study are Black graduate students. Although "African-American" is a popular term, it encompasses a more narrow group of individuals than what this study focuses on. The term African-American also limits the study to only include individuals born in the United States. This study focuses on experiences of all types of graduate students who identify as Black. For the purposes of this study, "Black" is defined as individuals who are familiar with the Black American experience but also have an understanding of their full ancestry in other countries . For example, one participant was born and raised in Trinidad. The term African-American does not apply to her, but she still identifies with the Black graduate student experience. Utilizing the term "Black" intentionally includes participants who identify with other countries and nationalities.

The sample includes a total of 11 participants attending a midsized predominantly white institution (PWI) in a Midwestern state. Eight participants identified as female and three participants identified as male; their ages ranged from 22 to 25 years old. The participants within

the study represented a variety of graduate programs offered by the university. Finally, the participants were individuals considered by the university as full time graduate students. All members needed a minimum of six months of experience within the organization to qualify for inclusion in this study. This selection process was utilized to ensure all members have a clear perception of the university structure and reduces the chances of reflecting on experiences other than their university experience.

Procedure

After receiving approval from the relevant Institutional Review Board on November 16, 2018 (study number IRB-FY2019-286). See Appendix A and B for IRB approval and informed consent documents. Participants in the study were recruited by snowball sampling. Two qualitative methods—a focus group and interviews—were used to analyze the understanding of the participants' experience with policy and procedures within the organization. The researcher conducted a total of six face-to-face interviews and one focus group. The interviews and focus group were audio recorded (with participant permission) and transcribed. The focus group was first conducted with seven participants to determine initial themes in participant experiences and establish terminology, definitions, and examples to be utilized in subsequent interviews. Follow up one-on-one interviews were then conducted with three individuals who were a part of the focus group. Interviews were also conducted with four other individuals who were not a part of the original focus group as a means of further solidifying emergent themes across participant experiences. The interviews were semi-structured and included questions focused on their experiences as Black graduate students within the bureaucratic structure of the university. See Appendix C and D for the list of questions asked of participants.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized to determine the key themes apparent in participant responses. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify themes to address specific research questions or to identify something salient about a particular issue (Braun & Clark, 2006). The use of a coding process allows for the researcher to identify themes based purely on the data transcribed. This process also aides in comparing data and identifying relationships emerging between themes within the data.

The first step in this process involves becoming familiar with the data; establishing familiarity with the data included reading and re-reading transcripts, making notes, and organizing all aspects of data. When reading through interview transcriptions, notes were taken which identified potential initial themes that emerged from the data. The second step involved generating a list of initial, open codes. Open coding ensured that all instances of data relevant to research questions were represented by an initial code, which ultimately aided in the process of theme development. Step three involved searching for themes in the list of open codes; themes in this instance are patterns of significance used to answer the research questions. Step four incorporated reviewing the themes for overlap, combining themes when appropriate, and analyzing theme alignment with the research questions. The modification of combining themes and creating an overall theme contributed the development of a variety of subthemes which contributed nuance to the findings presented below. Finally, after defining themes and clarifying what the themes meant allowed for a clear answers to the research questions guiding this research (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Author Identity

       It is important to acknowledge that, as the author of this study, I also identify as a Black graduate student. While the experiences shared by participants relate to my own personal experiences, I attempted to limit my own bias in order to provide a space for participants to tell their own stories. My identity enabled me to conduct research more effectively, being that I was able to provide a space for the participants to offer their authentic feelings. In the results below, the reader will be exposed to raw and authentic participant responses as a means of giving voice to the stories that permeate their existence.

RESULTS

This study first sought to better understand how Black graduate students perceive and process the components of the university's bureaucratic structure. Findings show that participants explored their perceptions of bureaucracy by reflecting on both positive and negative elements of that structure. Secondly, findings revealed that participants make sense of university attempts to adapt to diverse constituents by creating coping strategies that include: performing roles, locating white allies, and creating dissent.

Perceptions of Bureaucratic Structure

This section of results focuses on the research question one which was centered on perceptions and processing the university bureaucratic structure. The first section begins with positive elements identified by participants. Next, negative elements are identified by the participants, and finally the historically Black college and university (HBCU) versus the predominantly white institution (PWI) discussion is included in this section.

Positive. There were some positive experiences reflected upon by participants when exploring the impact of university structure. Bureaucracy created a sense of order for some. Many individuals would reflect on how the university would run if we did not have a structure of some sort. This finding could be due to the fact that students are simply not familiar with life without a set of rules or commands being invoked. It was clear that people did not mind abiding by rules, policies, and procedures when guided by someone they deemed they could trust.

Rationalizing Structure. There were occurrences in which people talked about reporting to their supervisor and the ability of their supervisor to look after them and have their best interest at heart. For example, in an interview with Rose she explained:

> Because my boss here at my GA and just the people who work within this office – the [diversity office] umbrella, they are the ones that made me feel welcomed and they are the ones that made me feel like I had a community.

In such instances of support from those higher in the hierarchy, individuals accepted bureaucratic structure. The notion of "it's not what you know, but who you know" was a driving force for many, which implied that participants knew how to make the bureaucratic structure work for them. For example, some of the participants gained a position on campus by simply knowing a specific individual. These experiences changed the lens through which participants viewed structural bureaucracy due to their benefiting from certain elements of it.

In another example, Josh speaks about his hiring experience and being able to make the necessary connection in order to obtain a job.

> I was a GA for [a certain department] and then I ended up getting a full time position because I kind of knew the people who are in [another department]. And so the people in my [first] department basically talked to the people who were in [the new department] and because of, you know, the power of those two knowing each other and kind of speaking highly of me that was a basically a way for me to get the job that I have now.

In another example, Theo is working through the process of rationalizing bureaucracy and the sense of security created when rules are established.

> Like what it would be like without rules, without structure, without systems, without you know anything... so I think about that too sometimes like I don't know if I necessarily want to go back to like being in the jungle you hear me – but at the same time things weren't fair – that wasn't fair either but it could definitely – I think people would be – I don't know – if you would be more cautious or not –

Idk if you would be more trusting or not because even within the systems you're still cautious, still don't necessarily trust them, but they do bring you a false sense of security.

Overall, participants were able to recall positive engagements within bureaucracy, and were vocal about such experiences within the university. Although the idea of operating without rules and policies was discussed briefly, participants articulated that structure of some sort is necessary in the university setting.

<u>Muted Group Authority (Adequate Representation).</u> Although not discussed by all participants, a few explicitly mentioned the benefit of a bureaucratic, hierarchical structure in which there are diverse staff, curriculum, and viewpoints. In these instances, students talked about the benefits of learning with a variety of people in mind. Students are able to take classes with people who look like them and gain a sense of hope. Students noted how refreshing it was to have someone of color in positions of power, including faculty, department heads, etc. Making those connections is key to students feeling as if they belong in their program, even when the program is structured more traditionally. In the excerpt below Jermaine elaborates on her experience within her program.

I feel like, I've had a generally pleasant experience as well. I do think I've been in a unique situation because umm, my department head, the head of my program, all of the tenured faculty in my program are all African-American like there's more African American— per student ratio there's more African-American faculty than there are African-American students so I feel like the power dynamics within my program are probably pretty unique to like any program at a PWI anywhere

In another example, Kate talked about how the department head was able to create a position for her being that her circumstances were unique:

Right – I don't see that in my program because my department head … he gets things done. I mean even to give me my GA position like he created my position for me. So I'm pretty sure he had to go through other people but like I'm- it wasn't a problem.

In each of these examples, participants discussed a uniquely positive experience with bureaucracy. Each participant spoke about how there are some evident differences with their experience and the experience of other Black graduate students. The level of adequate representation in programs is an important element being that different perspectives are recognized and students are able to feel as though they belong within the program.

Advisor Support. There were illustrations in which participants spoke of their advisors who they communicated with in order to ease their experience at the university. Students were able to feel a sense of recognition when their advisors supported them as showcased below in the comment made by Janelle:

I feel included when – say for instance like my graduate advisor and I – he is also my professor— are having conversations or when in class we're talking about race and I may say something and he'll back me up. And it's like seeing that a white male is willing to back me up is like yes – I want that, I want somebody to make sure that I feel inclu—not only feel included, but what I'm saying is correct.

In the excerpt below Clarice speaks to her experience with her advisor creating an opportunity, and going above and beyond to make sure that she was able to take a class needed as part of a requirement for her program.

I didn't even ask him to ask - I didn't know he had as much influence as he did - I was just telling him as my advisor, like I don't know how I'm going to get this internship because [a certain scholarship program] won't pay for a Summer course - I need it billed for the Fall…blah, blah, blah, I don't know what to do and he was like, "I got it." We were on the first floor, he walked all the way up to the fourth floor, chased the man down and was like, "Hey, change this." And I was like, speechless.

35

In the excerpt below Michelle is able to showcase how although she does not have a close relationship with her advisor, she still feels as though she is able to reach out to her advisor for support within the program.

> I feel like I feel supported in my program, with my advisor I've never had the relationship - and granted I don't feel like me and her have a great relationship, but I do feel like the relationship I do have with her I haven't had before and I admire her as a person and stuff. And I feel like she supports me, but as far as like the university - separating program from university, I don't feel like I have - besides I get to go to grad school for free and I'm getting my stipend— outside of that, more so mental, socially I don't feel like I'm super supported - you know I feel like there's always more that can be done.

Negative. "I walk into the room and they look at me like I owe them something and I don't owe you shit." Jermaine recalls the words from a recording from a conversation between a former student and an administrator in a diversity office. He made these comments towards Black students who visited the center for multicultural services. The recordings of their conversation surfaced on social media, made local news, and impacted students of color on campus. During the focus group the participants reflected on their experiences during that time and their perceptions of how the situation was handled by the university. During the time of the event faculty and staff working within the center were locating new career opportunities, or retiring. Participants reflected on how there was a perceived shift as Jermaine recalls in the excerpt below:

> Back to the bureaucracy thing - that literally changed the whole like umbrella. Because it was [the diversity office] was under [a certain division] and then it moved to another umbrella with another budget with another person in charge. They hired all new staff none of which were Black.

The negative experiences recalled by some of the participants within the focus group were shared by interviewees as well. The experiences of all individuals varied, but there were some shared familiarities for participants. Within this section, participants in the study articulate the negative experiences they faced. Some felt as though they are excluded from the university structure altogether, others elaborate on disingenuous diversity efforts, and finally the impact of white privilege (power) is highlighted. Overall participants were aware of complacency behaviors performed by muted groups due to the university bureaucracy serving a select few of members.

Structural Exclusion. One key finding with regard to the negative impacts of a bureaucratic structure is that there seems to be no "in between" when you are a Black graduate student (i.e., a member of a muted group relatively low in hierarchical status): either you are glorified through tokenism or you are overlooked. For example:

> Students of color are overlooked simply because – you're either overlooked or glorified. So you're overlooked because it's just like oh well you just here you're probably doing mediocre work. And then you're glorified if you're really doing something and you're vocal about what you're doing and people see the potential in you. So it really just varies, you may receive support depending on if you have taken a stance and say this is what I want to do within this field, this is what I want to pursue in my next two years – now if you just sit back and come to class and do your work then nobody is going to be like oh she's just here, she's just another student. You have to – I feel like in my experience, I've had to take initiative and step out and say this what I am doing, this is what I want to do in order to receive the support that you need.

In another example, a participant highlighted the difficulties of being a part of a system that he feels was not created for him:

> I mean it wasn't a problem for me, but I can see how it can be a problem for others but it just never – it never was a problem for me to talk to anybody because I never even paid attention to the fact that we are in a system that like – this is –

racism is taught to generations and microaggressions are going to happen and all this I don't – it never made sense.

Relatedly, Rose speaks about the privilege of being a white person and how there are clear differences between the interpretations of the behaviors of white people and Black people in a traditionally structured environment.

> Because anything done by a white person is always accepted by other white people. They could be eating food with their toes and they would be like – oh I've never thought about that. [Laughs] Like if a person of color did that, they'll be like barbaric [laughs] so I just feel like anything that's ever done by a white person, it's always acceptable.

Highlighting the differences between majority group members and muted group members, code switching is stated to be a concern more for Black students compared to white students. In an exchange of participants in the focus group for this study, individuals bring attention to the differences in experiences and how often Black graduate students have to engage in strategic conversations when communicating shared cultural experiences. Furthermore, it also highlights how majority group members reference Black cultural terms and/or phrases without strategically thinking about how the phrases impact their character.

> Me: Do you feel like code switching is a concern for majority groups at the university? Why or why not?
> Tito: I don't feel so because like --- the world was made for white people - like literally - they don't have to worry about it. They could come in here like hey girl –- I mean Black people would look at them like what's wrong with you but --
> Joshua: It's a concern for us but for them it's like--
> Tito: Bye Felicia -- that's literally like a perfect example, like they don't even know who Felicia is
> Me: Felicia is a crackhead.
> Tito: Yeah but they'll say it.

These examples show that participants are faced with the challenge of finding a place to belong and are pushed to form their own spaces in order to cope with experiences and practices at the university. Such coping strategies are discussed in more detail below, when addressing the study's second research question. The needs for each student vary and the accommodations do not—a clear indicator of the "iron cage" of bureaucracy. For example Kate voices her views on the system of bureaucracy at the university.

> I just think like when you think of a system in that sense it's just like the higher up people, and when you think about the higher up people you think of the white people so – I just think like a lot of things get decided without the minorities input – again I don't know if that's right or not it's just – hey.

Most felt as if their Blackness was a box to check rather than something that was worth being explored. What works for one Black graduate student may not work for another, which is something that members of majority groups fail to understand.

Disingenuous Diversity Efforts. One of the most common negative impacts of bureaucratic structure that participants discussed was that of disingenuous diversity efforts. Participants articulated that what few diversity efforts existed in the university were worthless, in that only a bare minimum of effort was made by those in positions of power. During an interview, Rose was asked about the nature of inclusivity and whether she felt included at the university:

> Me: As a graduate student you don't feel included?
>
> Rose: No. I feel like [the university] does a really trash job at creating environments for their graduate students. When I first started here in 2016, I almost left because I felt so uncomfortable here. It was really hard for me to like – it was really tough to figure out where my resources were as a graduate student. It took me a long time to create a community here amongst myself and other graduate students because I mean, yeah, there are like other students of color but they are like underclassmen.

The limited number of diversity efforts only take place to keep the problem hidden, not to solve the problem. For example, the diversity office on campus is asked to host and put on events, but are limited in their funding. Therefore, they are being required to do one thing, but others are controlling the funds they need. Rose demonstrates this element of constraining structure:

> Like there's always asking and asking for things but don't provide the resources I feel like all the time to make that possible for certain offices like – they are constantly asking my office to do more events and do these things and stuff but then they cut our budget to like $20 grand this year and it continues to get cut every couple of months. Like my boss is coming back and telling us that we're losing more money. So it's like how are we supposed to function as an office and continue to do the things that you are proud of or happy with before if you keep – you know, if you're not following through with your word…

These disingenuous diversity efforts take place in the classroom as well. Members of the majority group may not be familiar with being in classrooms with Black students; therefore, they attempt to accommodate for their lack of experience by speaking in slang terms in an attempt to connect with Black individuals. As Theo explains:

> ... as a white person talking to a Black person and using slang or terms that mainly Black people use in an attempt to connect with them is – to the Black person it might feel like you think you know but you don't know, which is upsetting because that is a situation that they could never experience

In the excerpt below, Janelle reflects on her experience as a teaching assistant. She speaks to her interactions with colleagues who are majority group members, as they attempt to make connections and look to her for guidance in their dealings with students of color.

There's been times when things would be said because of course like all of the students that I am with are also teaching assistants, so I'm still the only Black person out of that group. So there are times when like things would be said that I'm just like – did you really just say that around me like – asking why – what does GOAT mean, just little things like that – just having conversations like that or using slang terms that aren't necessarily used around other cultures... or students coming up or no not even students – yeah other grad students coming up and asking, "Hey, how should I handle this situation with this student of color?" Or, "how should I handle this situation that was presented in class about a student of color?" Or anything related to color in general and them feeling like they just need to come and talk to me.

The diversity efforts on campus are made by those higher in the organizational structure and by their peers, but were deemed to be flawed by participants. Diversity is not something that you can teach, but instead requires genuine behaviors to take place by those within the bureaucracy at the university. Janelle speaks to her experience when discussing diversity efforts with a dean on campus and she reflects on what she was able to take away from the conversation that took place.

And so I asked him if he saw like, I asked him to speak on his experience at [the university] and if he feels like [the university] is an institution that is diverse and inclusive and, if not, how can they make changes in order to make sure they are implementing diversity and inclusion. And he kind of just got really red and didn't know how to answer the question and kind of – never like – he beat around the bush basically and really didn't answer the question, and it's like those are things that need to be addressed. If we are a diverse and inclusive campus, we should be able to have a conversation in the room with other graduate students discussing [the university's] efforts and ways they can improve or ways in which they are doing well. And so – just things like that – seeing men in particular – in power not really open to expressing or even having conversations about diversity and how [the university] has taken initiative to implement diversity it's just like concerning.

These efforts or lack thereof had a prominent impact on participants. In fact, the sheer discussion of disingenuous diversity efforts shifted the mood of participants in interviews. It was almost as if participants began to accept their placement in the structure of the university and

became complacent with not fitting in but instead getting their degree and not looking back. As Rose stated in the interview below:

> Honestly I would just tell them just get your degree and go. [Laughs] Like if you can – you know focus on that and then leave unless you find the environment here being in [the city] here, you know something that you like – then I would just be like get your degree and move on to something better.

During the interview when asked about her ideal experience, Janelle was unable to offer an ideal experience due to not feeling included as a Black graduate student:

> Because I've never had an experience where I have felt included. I've never – especially within the university I've never had an experience where I feel included and I wouldn't even know what it would take for me to feel included and to feel genuinely included because there are a lot of majority people that state that they are for Black people and really aren't so it's like – they may talk it until they are blue in the face but their actions may not line up to that. So it's like I don't – I couldn't tell you what it would talk in order for me to feel included at a predominantly white institution.

White Privilege (Power). Another specific negative influence of bureaucratic structure that students discussed was the fact that white male voices are the norm and are usually the traits of those who are making the decisions at the university in a variety of areas. For example, Janelle stated:

> Majority of the people that control funds are white males. [Laughs] Like you have men in power, like that's who controlling the funds, so when you look at that – if they're controlling the funds then and what is provided on campus and what is produced – social media wise, event wise, it's based off of their views because they have the money in their hands. So regardless if they have genuine intentions to create something or to establish a different fund on campus for a particular group, it may not always be genuine – it may just be a thing to show oh well we care a little bit and then their actions leading up to the different events that they plan or different things they – engage in doesn't show that – that's truly where they are at.

The participants recognized repeatedly that people who do not look like them are making decisions on their behalf.

> I think it's because the people who are in charge of that are white – I mean not to say that people who are white can't understand Black people but at the same time, like if you don't it's going to be hard to bring in that crowd you know what I'm saying.

When asked about the influence power has on bureaucracy, Janet talks about how she views the practice of decision making at the university. She reflected on experiences and conversations with majority group members who typically hold power positions.

> Because I think like if our straight white men feel like we have met the quota of people of color on campus then that's it. [Mocking] They're fine, they're fine, they can go talk to—insert name—she's doing fine she's doing good. Yep.

As this excerpt indicates, the Black voice is not completely absent from the university, but it is relatively unimportant. There is power in numbers; if change is going to take place, there needs to be more than one person of color who is representing the voices of muted groups. As Josh states in his interview:

> Like I said, it's a numbers thing like even the ones that do have power, usually a lot of things that are decided on are done by a vote. So if it's two Black people voting on something and there's ten people in the room it could be you know four and six and it favors you know the people that are not of color because there are only so many of them…

While interviewing Theo, speaks about the privilege and reassurance majority group members encounter being a part of the university and the reassurance faced by being exposed to people who look like you in a variety of positions:

... They're the majority in the classroom and it's everything that they are most likely use to besides this one Black person in the room. So that's probably a completely different – oh and walking around on campus. Seeing a bunch of people that are like you or that look like you, it is very reassuring. Just like I said when you don't see people looking like you it's the opposite of that – it's not reassuring at all. Like, should I even be here?

In an interview with Kate, she reflects on an uncomfortable experience and speaks to how the situations was handled from her perspective.

I have been unfortunate enough to be in situations where like Title IX and stuff has been involved and like I've seen the way they hide stuff, and the way they just like make things to their benefit. To where like they – they don't consider – like the higher up people [I'm going to start saying that] they don't consider how it affects us only how it affects them. Like they don't care – that's how I feel. I feel like they don't care because I've been in situations where they had the opportunity to show me that they do care to reach out and say listen like I'm sorry this happened blah, blah, blah – whatever, whatever – but they didn't instead they chose to just hide their mistakes you know so – I don't trust them.

There is power in numbers and power in policies, rules, and procedures that are controlled by majority group members. The participants above reflected on personal experiences and the impact that not seeing individuals in a variety of power positions reinforced their beliefs in the structure excluding their voice.

Historically Black College or University vs. Predominantly White Institution. Interestingly, the idea of attending a historically Black college or university (HBCU) is something that was explored by some of the participants when discussing the impact of bureaucratic structure. Rather than changing the bureaucratic structure of their predominantly white institution (PWI), participants longed for experiencing an environment in which their group was the majority and they were surrounded with individuals who looked like them. As Tito put it: "Go to an HBCU where they love you but they don't have no money."

In fact, for many, the financial expectations of HBCUs was the sole reason why they ended up at a PWI. The focus group participants agreed collectively on the experience being one that they were not able to afford. The HBCU was thought to offer an experience of engaging with other people of color and connecting on the premise of shared culture. In fact, in the focus group, participants spoke of the HBCU experience with an apparent level of adoration. For example, consider this exchange among focus group participants:

> Me: What would be your ideal experience?
> Janet: Here?
> Tito: An HBCU.
> Clarice: [To Tito] Good administration. PWI administration.
> Me: [To Tito] talk to me about that. Why an HBCU?
> Tito: [To Clarice] Yes, with the PWI funding.

Theo also expressed his interest in attending a HBCU, but the lack of funding offered to him did not accommodate his financial needs, but instead would have put him in a financial bind. He was faced with the decision of whether to attend a university in which funding was available or seek an experience at an HBCU which would increase debts owed.

> Basically it came down to the fact that [an HBCU] wouldn't give me a
> scholarship and I was able to get a GA position here. So it came to who could pay
> for me basically and the HBCU cost way more than here and there was – I would
> be going in way more debt.

The HBCU experience is sought after yet not deemed as plentiful in regard to financial awards ways according to participants. Longing for the experience is one thing but being able to stay and enjoy the experience is something else to consider. In order to combat their decision in choosing to study at a PWI many of the participants sought out opportunities in which they were

able to feel accomplished and have considered choosing to study at an HBCU if they decided to advance their education.

Coping with Bureaucratic Structure

The following section discusses coping mechanisms discussed by the participants, in order to cope with the bureaucratic structure. The information included in this section addresses research question two which focuses on coping mechanisms used by Black graduate students. The section is introduced with an overview of performing roles and includes excerpts from the data that indicate how each role has occurred for each participant. All of these elements will be explained in more detail in the following sections.

Performing Roles. One of the most common ways of making sense of the university's response to diverse constituents is by developing coping strategies for handling all of the negative impacts discussed above. The need for an advanced degree for the purpose of creating opportunity has outweighed their negative experiences in the university. In this way, the participants were socialized to survive these rigid bureaucratic structures that privilege majority group members. Therefore, the elements of performing roles, locating white allies, and creating dissent were all tactics used by participants to make sense of their experiences.

Performing roles encompasses four elements derived from the data: survival, racism respondent, Black spokesperson, and code switching. Participants are aware of the lack of representation in all elements of the university, from the classroom to campus life. However, they still choose to attend the university and seem to make sense of the status quo by performing necessary roles to make their time at the university easier. Participants perform these roles as a

way to adjust to their surroundings and respond to experiences that take place in a variety of settings at the university.

Survival. First, participants speak about their negative experiences as "surviving" and how their mental state impacts their ability to think in terms of survival. In an interview with Janelle she speaks to her academic life as a graduate student, while reflecting on her success through adversity.

> Because it's possible, like me, myself, I've been myself; and it's like you can still succeed regardless of everything that may be around you, that may be preventing you like... although your environment may not be the best of environments.

Joshua recalls his complacency behaviors with figuring things out on his own, which included locating necessary resources in order to be successful at the university:

> I feel like I'm use to kind of fending for myself and learning things on my own so I don't – I didn't really – I guess it really didn't faze me but at the same time I kind of thought that you know your advisor was someone that you could go to and if I can't go to him then who can I go to but I kind of just reached out to other students and kind of figured things out on my own and just figured you know eventually it'll work out so...

Overall the excerpts above serve as examples derived from one on one interviews with the participants. Their comments exhibit how Black graduate students are expected to fend for themselves and create their own opportunities.

Racism Respondent. There were also times when most of the participants had to address racism presented in the classroom or in other university contexts. For example, Michelle speaks about her classroom experience when her professor presented statistics to the class and omitted other races but primarily focused on majority group members:

But I will say there was a time in class umm, it was in my public health, one of my public health classes umm, we were going over some statistics or whatever and the word he used to describe the population he used white and non- white and it made me feel some type of way… it's like… you know white isn't the only...

In this example Rose, provides her experiences in class as a Black woman expressing her thoughts and feelings and experiencing invalidation when speaking her truth.

Obviously I can't generalize my experiences for every Black woman in the world, but I can speak on my experiences and some of my experiences haven't been all that great and some of my experiences with white people haven't been that great. And when I speak on that, a lot of – some people in the class they – in my class just like "well that's not all white people" – [takes deep breath] and I'm like okay – [laughs] – thank you for invalidating what I just shared. That's cool, you know.

Theo was able to reflect on his experience in the classroom when a student referred to someone as "colored." In this moment, Theo felt the need to express to the classmate that the terminology used was not acceptable.

Well my first thing with that one was, when she first said it, I was taken back – I'm like, "Colored?" like, naw that one was too much for me – that one was too much for me. That took me back to a time that I wasn't even in and all I thought about was what they had to go through with that word around. Like it was colored water fountains, it was colored restaurants, like you couldn't sit – that was segregation; so for me that was too much. That was too much – and especially the way she used it. She really kind of did use it ignorantly – she was like I don't – I went to a small high school and da da da and we only had one colored student in our graduating class. So I'm like – and I was instantly like, "Colored is the wrong word, you know what I'm saying. You could use Black, African-American, person of color... umm but colored is the wrong word." She was like, "I'm sorry, I didn't know." And I'm like, okay, you know... at that time, I'm like... I know her now, she cool, she good, you know what I'm saying. But at that time, I'm like "Bruh how do you not know? How do you not know?" But it was... I mean, with her she literally had no idea and then it was like, wow so that can happen...

Black Spokesperson. Relatedly, often participants have been tasked with being the spokesperson for the Black experience. The spokesperson is thought to be a representative for all Black people. In the example below, Clarice is speaking to her experiences when being assigned a project in her internship.

> Even with internships, like as soon as my first day, it was like, "You'll be working on diversity projects" or in class they'll be like, "What topics do you want for your paper - oh you should do diversity." It's like okay. I want something else -- I'm Black but…

As Clarice's response indicates, this notion of the Black spokesperson is being identified by others as the one who will be informed about all elements of the Black experience. The idea of becoming a spokesperson is a duty that is typically given to Black students at predominantly white institutions.

Code Switching. Code Switching was a phenomenon that many participants admitted to engaging in at times. Participants were asked if they felt the need to code switch as a means of succeeding within the structure of the university. The majority of participants in the study felt the need to code switch at some point in their college career, but as students became more acclimated to and/or involved with the university, the need to code switch reduced due to connections made or longing to be their authentic self. Jermaine spoke about her experience growing up and why code switching was not a necessity for her, but she also recognized that her experience was likely unique.

> Well I am going to say for me, no. But I also know that for me that is coming from a position of privilege, that I've always been told that I talk white. I grew up with white people, I went to school with white people so I mean the change in my dialect...

Similarly, Kate speaks to why she code switches in an attempt to fit in.

> Kate: But it's definitely – it changes more with white people.
> Me: Okay – so it changes more. Why do you feel like you need to do that because
>   you say you have an accent?
> Kate: Just to fit in.

Finally, Rose speaks to her experience in becoming more comfortable with herself and shifting the focus to become less concerned with pleasing others, but instead remaining true to herself.

> But yeah – I feel like I've just gotten to a place now where I'm kind of just like,
> fuck it. [Laughs] Like I shouldn't have to change the way I talk or change – you
> know the way I hold myself to, you know, be more pleasing to like the white
> person's eye – that's not something that I want to do and like it's more
> uncomfortable for me than it is for that white person to have to deal with that and
> deal with that pressure. But it took me a really long time to get there.

Finding White Ally. Another coping mechanism is that of locating a majority group member ally or many allies who sit higher in the structure of the university. Locating a white ally had the potential to promote advancement in the bureaucratic structure. Kate speaks about how finding a white ally was a form of security for her. In this way, majority group members offer a layer of protection in the encounters that Black graduate students have.

> Yeah, yeah that's like security because again like – I feel like that same security
> situation if we didn't have that white friend, like things would have gone probably
> a different direction – you know, like, it's kind of like back up because sometimes
> they don't take our word so you need somebody to stick up for you on the other
> side.

Though not explicitly stated, participants seemed to recognize the benefit of being accepted by those positioned higher in the hierarchy. They were able to recognize the game that

needed to be played in order to reach new heights in the hierarchy for themselves. In this way, participants' sense making process was a direct response to the impact that the bureaucratic structure had on them. As Theo explained:

> ... yes, certain people are allotted the power and they have influence. But that's a whole different thing to think about – it's not about what you know it's about who you know.

In another example, the following exchange from focus group data reveals the importance of finding an ally among the majority group. In a conversation taking place about unionizing, Tito points out the importance of a white face as the face of a movement and/or the formation of an organization: "You can takeover – no we need a white face, we need a white girl."

This strategy becomes: In order to be heard, include a white person in your life in some capacity, because that is how people take you seriously. Without white security, the process of making change or getting people to recognize the Black voice is a challenge. Thus, there is a constant need to make the connections with majority group members.

Participant Dissent. The idea of dissent is able to be understood as process that is ongoing for participants. The individuals in the study were able to recognize behaviors in which they engaged in within the bureaucratic structure and began making sense of their actions. The participants also recognized behaviors within themselves that had both mental and physical impacts on them. In this portion of the results participants are exploring the behaviors and reflecting on past experiences that have an impact on how they respond to encounters.

Conforming/Nonconforming Behaviors. Creating ways to advance within the hierarchical structure was the driving force for many of the participants in terms of how they coped with a

rigid bureaucratic structure controlled by majority group members. Many participants did not realize how much they ignored the existing structure or how complacent they have become in accepting it. Many used the majority group as a default. During interviews, they attributed performing majority group behaviors as the way of survival. For example, Janelle speaks to her teaching experience and feeling the need to conform in order to be accepted by the students she teaches.

> I will say my first semester teaching, I code switched a little bit and I was like, this is not me. It's no use in me doing that. This semester I am more comfortable simply because I'm not code switching. I'm going to give it to you on my terms and that's just what it is – so – and I want my students as well to be able to do that too and not feel like they need to code switch. At a university level there has been times when either I am at a meeting or I'm around higher up individuals... yes, then it's necessary for me to code switch so that I look like I'm not just speaking in slang terms or I'm not saying things that someone else that is not my color wouldn't be able to understand. So yes – and it seems as when I'm just talking regular it's like not seen as intelligent and so if I go to an event and that's how I'm talking, I'm not seen as – so making sure like yes on that level it's necessary. Within the classroom, to a certain extent, it's necessary depending on what you're teaching. Like yes, I have to code switch a little bit when talking about [the subject matter] in general, but just the dynamic of my class I don't necessarily code switch a lot because it's not comfortable. Like it's not the norm for me – it's uncomfortable.

Lastly, Theo speaks about his hair acting as a representation of him, and not wanting to conform to the norms regardless of the negative stigmas associated with having Locs.

> There are not many doctors that have locs. You know there are not many people in the educational system that probably have locs in general, so my hair gives off even more preconceived ideas about me as a Black man that could not help me, but at the same time I am not one to conform like that to systems that have been put in place to make me cut my hair – when I love my hair. So yeah. That's how I feel about that.

<u>Racial Fatigue.</u> The Black graduate student is expected to know and clarify actions of other Black individuals for majority group members. This expectation has again become part of the role participants must play within the hierarchy of the university. One participant described this as "racial fatigue," which not only has impact on an individual emotionally but also physically.

> I don't know it's just a messy situation in the end – even for me that's why I'm just like really struggling with keeping this position because it's just like – I can only do this so much and now I feel like a lot of racial fatigue after a while because it's just like, okay we have [for example] Ruth coming in from [a neighboring city with a higher population of Black residents] or we have the high school coming from [another city with a higher population of Black residents]. "[Janet], can you give the presentation?" Well you have six other people that you can ask, but sure I'll give it because you need someone to be the face I guess.

Black graduate students are expected to be spokesperson as well as explain behaviors. The following participant recalls his actions and when addressing behaviors, he has to be strategic, when correcting the wrongs of majority group members.

> No it is not my job to do that – it's not my job to do that – to educate you or white people or a white person that's talking to me in a tone that I don't like – it's not my job to do that because I know what's going on but it's, it's a fine line because another thing that I would be skeptical about is like coming up to that white person that might have used the microaggression and coming off to strongly or whatever the case may be all these preconceived ideas they might have about me if I was to come off with any sort of backbone for myself I get looked at like oh I'm this kind of Black person so it's still not working – still not working.

As Theo illustrates above, it is not the job of Black graduate students to teach individuals about what behaviors are inappropriate. Theo is showcasing the thoughts that other participants were able to relate to. There is an element of being aware of your surroundings, because he does not want to be viewed negatively by majority group members. Many of the participants noted

that the Black experience is inferior to the experience of the majority groups. The inferiority complex comes from the historical implications of the bureaucratic structure.

To summarize these findings, this study focused on two key research questions. The first research question focused on the perception Black graduate students have of the bureaucratic structure at the university. These findings included the positive perceptions of rationalizing bureaucracy and finding advisor support. The negative components of perception included structural exclusion, disingenuous diversity efforts, and white privilege. The last component of this section included perceptions about HBCUs in comparison to PWIs—a particularly salient issue for participants. The second research question primarily focused on coping mechanisms used by Black graduate students who represent a muted group within the university's bureaucratic structure. These coping mechanisms include: performing roles, locating white ally, and creating dissent. In what follows, the practical and theoretical implications of these findings are discussed.

DISCUSSION

Muted group theory guided this research because the theory enforces the idea of silencing groups due to there being a lack of representation in a given societal or organizational structure. The theory also provides a useful framework for recognizing the relationship between power and muted voices (Meares, et al, 2004). In the following sections, the impact of representation is revisited, each premise of muted group theory and bureaucracy is explained in relation to the current study, and the intersection of muted group theory and bureaucratic organizing is discussed.

Representation Matters

Adequate representation of muted groups was deemed as a positive trait of the university's bureaucratic structure by participants in this study. Participants were able to form bonds and/or academic relationships with individuals who they deemed as genuinely caring about their well-being as a Black graduate student. Although the occurrence was rare at the university, seeing other Black faculty and other people of color in positions of power reinforced a sense of belonging at the university for participants. There was also reassurance when a Black graduate student was able to express themselves and feel as if they had the support from their advisors. The need for support was an important factor for those participants who pondered on the HBCU experience versus the PWI experience. Within an HBCU, most faculty, staff, and students are those who identify from the groups that participants identified with as well. Sharing a commonality in regards to race was perceived as creating a sense of support.

Instances in which participants had advisors who they felt would go above and beyond for them in regards to making sure they were on track academically had a positive impact on participants. These examples illustrate how specific members within the organizational structure are able to have a positive impact on students even when the structural layout of bureaucracy throughout the organization may have a negative impact. In other words, positive experiences with organizational members can and do exist in spite of negative experiences with organizational structure.

Muted Group Theory Premise Reflection

The first premise of muted group theory is that members from different groups have different experiences which result in their different perceptions of the world. Experiences are often interpreted differently for them by others with more power within an organization (Kramarae, 2005). Participants in this study were able to reflect on how white voices are privileged over Black voices from their experiences at predominantly white institutions. Individuals recalled instances and situations in which majority group members and their ideals are deemed as the norm, which reflect the nature of a rigid bureaucratic structure. In order to manage the differences of underrepresented group members, majority group members have made failed attempts to relate to Black graduate student experiences. There is a lack of cultural awareness in the classroom as well as on campus which further inhibits the problem from being solved. The examples that participants used reflected on how cultural norms for Black graduate students are perceived negatively when expressed by Black graduate students and positively when expressed by majority group members (white students).

The second premise of muted group theory is that each society privileges some groups over others (E. Ardener, 1978; S. Ardener, 1975, 1978). That privilege is enacted when those in power determine the dominant discourse of what society deems is appropriate (Meares, et. al, 2004). There are fewer opportunities for underrepresented groups to voice how they feel or to challenge the policies put forth by those in positions of power.

Disingenuous diversity efforts are taking place in university settings, meaning that underrepresented group members are not feeling as though their voices and efforts are being heard by those who possess power. Black graduate students are feeling as though they have to make room for themselves in order to belong on campus. Participants expressed how they felt excluded in decision making processes for policies and procedures which involve Black students. There are programs at the university that are allotted for diversity, but they are subjected to strict budgets and guidelines before being implemented. One participant in this study discussed the element of restriction when speaking about the apparent need for certain programs that will cater to diverse students; such programs are not being allotted the proper funding from those majority group members who possess the power of allocating necessary funding.

Next, the attempt to get concerns recognized in the public realm are only conveyed when communication from muted groups is the same as the dominant discourse (Meares, et. al, 2004). Members are expected to adjust their communication style to be heard by those who are a part of the dominant discourse. Participants in this study expressed the need to locate and befriend allies who sit higher in the structure than they do. Building a bond with a white ally was seen as a strategy that offered a sense of protection for some and a means to make their voice heard for others. Participants were aware of how you have to be strategic in order to advance within the structure. You also have to make connections with those people who possess power, which at

this particular university are majority group members. The formation of an alliance with a white ally created a connection as well as aided in individuals being able to maneuver (survive) in the system (structure).

Finally, the last premise of muted group theory includes the notion that resistance and change are possible under certain restrictions (Meares, et. al, 2004). This premise emphasizes the importance of resistance by muted group members. The set back is that, although muted members have a lot to say, there is little power to speak up without encountering trouble from those who are in power (Kramarae, 2005). In this sense, participants in this study displayed both conforming and nonconforming behaviors. Although many were willing to "play the game," there were elements of themselves they were simply not willing to adjust, meaning they were not willing to alter mental and/or physical characteristics of themselves in order to conform. For example, one participant stated how his hair (locs) was something that he would not compromise. He was aware of the negative connotation associated with his locs, but instead remained true to himself. A common theme amongst all participants was recognizing the level of conformity that was necessary in order to be recognized within the system at the university. This recognition led to overcoming silencing for many, being that they were able to realize that there voice is just as important as any other voice even if not reflected in the bureaucratic structure at the university. Participants were able to come to the realization of being their authentic self was enough, and if someone within the structure was unable to accept that then that no longer was a problem they needed to solve, but instead the individual with the problem needed to reflect within themselves.

Raced Related Muteness in Scholarship

White scholars and scholars of color may perceive the world differently. This difference is due in part to standards differing between the two groups. A scholar of color may not be held to the same regard as a white scholar (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). Given that participants in this study are scholars themselves, the work of Hendrix and Wilson (2014) provided valuable insight into further understanding how the university (or the academy in general) can serve as a bureaucratic structure contributing to race related muteness.

For example, the perceptions of campus surroundings differ heavily for Black graduate students due to the lack of representation. The classroom experience differs for the individual who is able to walk into a classroom and see people who look like them, in comparison to the Black individual who walks into the classroom and sees no one who looks like them. There is a different outlook and different roles that Black students feel they have to subconsciously represent. Participants reflected on becoming the Black spokesperson for the Black experience, which is a role many do not feel is their responsibility, but instead it is the responsibility of majority group members to explore different cultural perspectives on their own. The exploration of other cultures is thought to be an option for majority group members and a requirement for Black graduate students—a finding that further reinforces the power disparity present in university structure.

White scholars enact power politically, which perpetuates their power and reinforces the current systems (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). This principle of muted groups can be modeled through the Black female experience within the academic profession (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). Strides have taken place to change the dynamic, but they remain ignored or muted in most cases (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). This reinforces the notion of having a position, but not a position that

will earn notoriety in the field (Davis, 1999). Participants in this study expressed how the lack of adequate cultural representation within structures reinforced their position in the hierarchy of the university. The idea of the "iron cage" of bureaucracy indicates how status quo limits the amount of representation considered when forming policies and procedures. For example, one participant was able to reflect on her experience within the university and how she feels as if underrepresented groups are not involved in forming structural guidelines. The lack of representation has led to racial fatigue—a feeling of physical and emotional tiredness causing Black graduate students to be forced into certain roles based solely on the color of their skin.

Scholars of all races interested in studying the impact of race must convert their focus to match the mainstream research focus in order to be heard (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014). Converting to mainstream research would potentially increase the likelihood of work being recognized. When research does not match the current trend, the research has the potential to be viewed as obsolete or a lost cause. In the case of Black graduate students, they are expected to assimilate to majority group culture which generally involves reporting to and seeking approval from white males. Participants have the perception that appealing to people in power is how one must move through the structure of the university. Therefore, engaging in code switching is a factor that was explored as a means to be heard, but many felt uncomfortable and showcased their abilities while remaining true to themselves instead.

Practical Implications

As muted group theory asserts, there is a relationship between power and muted voices (Meares, et. al, 2004). This theory has been utilized to help inform individuals about the impact that power functions have in verbal and nonverbal communication patterns (Kramarae, 2005).

As traditionally bureaucratic structures, universities have to recognize that, although diversity and inclusion initiatives are a step in the right direction, they should be deemed as more than a university tag line. Roy (1995) emphasizes how terms such as inclusion are strategically paired together in an attempt to acknowledge economic and demographic change. She further analyzes the use of the phrase by bringing the attention to how such a phrase in one context may include people in some context, while excluding others in another context (Roy, 1995).

Disingenuous diversity efforts have a direct, often negative impact on student experiences. Genuine diversity efforts are needed and actions must be taken in order for Black graduate students to feel as though they are supported by their university. Institutions have to reflect on policies created in the past which historically did not make room for the non-elite or later, for non-mainstream college-goers (Roy, 1995). The language used within policies can entice both producers and consumers into believing that inclusivity and diversity have been successfully incorporated in official communications to faculty, students, and community (Roy, 1995).

According to muted group theory, the questioning of existing policies should be in response to the lack of representation or the misrepresentation of underrepresented groups within an organization. Ardener (2005) emphasized that muting by dominant groups through control of dominant discourse is reinforced through and engrained in many different social spaces. Members of majority groups also need to take a stand and recognize that a lack of representation in a university is a clear disadvantage to certain groups on campus. The formation of becoming a genuine white ally encompasses recognizing and being vocal about inequalities. In contrast, disingenuous white allyship focuses primarily on voicing opinions and concerns behind closed doors in order to appear to be in agreement with muted groups.

Thus, universities should consider reviewing hiring practices and being intentional in seeking people of color for positions—specifically positions of power such as department heads, deans, supervisors, etc. Guidelines need to be developed that reflect an adequate level of representation of traditionally muted groups on committees and in decision making groups in order for muted group members to be able to successfully navigate the bureaucratic structure of the university.

LIMITATIONS

This study was not without limitations. The first limitation was the limited amount of participants. The focus group in this study encompassed a cohesive group of Black graduate students with a total of seven participants who were able to establish meaning that contributed to the remaining interviews. However, the results of this study should be applied to the experiences of other Black graduate students and/or other muted groups with care; the experiences and perceptions of these participants may not generalize to other settings in which muted group members are existing in a bureaucratic structure.

In addition to the amount of participants, it is important to consider that this study took place with members from one university. Obtaining participants from different universities in other geographic regions might have uncovered more information about the experiences of other Black graduate students. Involving more universities, would have diversified perspectives and showcased other elements of muted group experiences.

Finally, this study focused solely on the Black graduate student experience. Although that was intention, there are other forms of muted groups who are impacted by the university's bureaucratic structure. Future research should seek to include the viewpoints and experiences of other muted groups. Showcasing the experiences of others can seek to further validate and solidify the structural changes that need to take place within the university. For future research, the framework for this study might be replicated in order to incorporate more muted voices and allot other muted group members with a chance to be heard.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to better understand the impact that bureaucratic structure has Black graduate students in the university setting. Through the use of qualitative data gathering and analysis, this study provided valuable insight into the experiences of participants in meaningful ways that can inform both those in positions of power in universities and those who are members of muted groups. As previously mentioned at the beginning of this study, the battle of finding a balance between the authentic self and the academic self is a phenomenon that sparked my interest within the current study. The journey of unmuting voices and bringing awareness to the situations and circumstances faced by Black graduate students begins with the research. Therefore, showcasing experiences that have an impact both emotionally and socially on students is important.

There is a lack of attention on the Black graduate student experience and it is my hope that this research has sparked the attention and conversation of everyone involved within a bureaucratic structure. By utilizing muted group theory to analyze participant experiences, this study has provided readers with a clarified understanding of Black graduate students within a university setting. My goal was to provide readers with the necessary information in order to enhance experiences of underrepresented groups. When reviewing literature and research within the field, there is often a focus primarily on majority group members. The Black voice and viewpoint is often not included, which could be for a variety of reasons. Research needs to be more inclusive. As this study has solidified for me, it is vital for members of muted groups to be better represented, not only in academia, but in other organizations as well. This thesis is a step in the right direction, and I urge future scholars to extend this research to a variety of other

organizations. We cannot simply stop at the university, because doing so will only serve to perpetuate the cycle of muted groups.

To whom much is given, much is expected. Therefore, individuals in power must take a stand to include more variety within bureaucracies. The incorporation of different viewpoints, logic, stances, etc. keeps the world unique—and that is a beautiful thing.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

To:
Carrisa Hoelscher
Communications
Carrisa Hoelscher

RE: Notice of IRB Approval
Submission Type: Initial
Study #: IRB-FY2019-286
Study Title: The Bureaucratic Structure of Power and Muted Group Experiences
Decision: Approved

Approval Date: November 15, 2018
Expiration Date: November 15, 2019

This submission has been approved by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the period indicated.

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:
PI: Carrisa Hoelscher
Co-PI: Carrisa Hoelscher
Primary Contact: Demetria Green
Other Investigators: Demetria Green

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Missouri State University
College of Arts and Letters

The Bureaucratic Structure of Power and Muted Group Experiences

Introduction

You have been asked to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the study and the procedures involved. The investigator will also explain the project to you in detail. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, be sure to ask the investigator. If you have more questions later, Demetria Green the person mainly responsible for this study, will answer them for you. You may contact the investigator(s) at:

You will need to sign this form giving us your permission to be involved in the study. Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this project is to explore bureaucracy at the university setting and analyze the impact power structure has on underrepresented groups utilizing Muted Group Theory. This theory is used to examine how power functions in both verbal and nonverbal communication. Essentially, contributions to this study will lead to a better understanding of how the bureaucratic structure impacts communication within underrepresented groups.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group and/or interview which will focus on your experiences as a member of the university community. Focus groups and interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission. Focus groups and interviews will be scheduled at a time and in a location that is mutually convenient for you, the researcher(s), and other participants. Your total amount of time commitment as a participant of this study will be no longer than 2 hours.

<u>**What are the risks?**</u>

There are no known risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

<u>**What are the benefits?**</u>

You may not benefit directly from this study. However, the information from this study will help inform understanding of communication practices in the university setting, heighten awareness of bureaucratic policies, and explore positive and negative outcomes of being members of a university.

How will my privacy be protected?

The results of this study are confidential and only the investigators will have access to the information, which will be kept in password-protected files. Study numbers and pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant. Your name or personal identifying information will not be used in any published reports of this research.

Consent to Participate

If you want to participate in this study, "The Bureaucratic Structure of Power and Muted Group Experiences," you will be asked to sign below:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records,

_____

Signature of Participant

_____

Date

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

1. How would you explain your graduate school experience as a student of color?

2. How would you all define bureaucracy within the institution or the university

3. Think back to a time in which bureaucracy was reinforced and/or evident to you? What did it look like?

4. Can you give me some examples that you have experienced or witnessed at the university?

5. What relationship - if any have you experienced between bureaucracy and power?

6. Do you feel supported by the university? If so in what ways if not can provide examples?

7. What advice would you give to an incoming Black graduate student on how to prepare for the university?

8. Is code switching a necessity for you?

9. What change do you feel needs to be made at the university?

10. What would be your ideal experience?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What does the word bureaucracy mean to you?

2. How do you see bureaucracy playing out in this university?

3. Does the bureaucratic structure influence who is allotted power?

4. Does the hierarchy of the university influence your behavior? Can you provide examples?

5. Do you feel included in your university? Why? Why not?

6. Do you feel supported by your university? In what ways?

7. Tell me about a time when you have engaged in code switching or have witnessed others doing so.

8. Do you notice differences between your experiences and the experiences of majority group members?

9. What are your experiences as a student color? Is there a difference between those who are a part of the majority group?

10. What does it mean to be a racial minority in a university setting?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?