

The Experience of White Students as a Temporary Minority in TRIO-Funded Programs

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Although research has been conducted on the experience of White students as temporary minorities in some racial minority settings, little research focuses White students' experiences as a temporary minority in TRIO-funded programs. In this study, the experience of White students in a TRIO experience were examined through focus groups. Findings suggest that students often had an initial fear of the experience; however, they felt the program was largely positive and beneficial to their growth and development. Participants expressed an overall consensus pertaining to the advantages of being in a diverse student environment. Implications and conclusions for program administrators, student affairs professionals, and other campus leaders are discussed.

Federally-funded Student Support Services (TRIO) programs have existed for over forty years. These programs have enabled thousands of students to gain access to college and assisted students in multiple capacities, including academic tutoring, advising, and other success-oriented activities (U.S Department of Education, n.d.). The primary goal of the programs is to “provide college students from disadvantaged backgrounds with assistance in meeting basic college requirements, opportunities for academic development, and motivation to successfully complete their postsecondary education” (McElroy & Armesto, 1998, p. 375). While the focus of TRIO programs does not specifically mention race, the greater part of the participants in most of the programs are racial or ethnic minorities (McCants, 2003). The racial dynamic of TRIO programs potentially places White student participants in a “temporary minority” role (Hall & Closson, 2005). This temporary role is inconsistent with the predominantly White society in which White students participate as members of the majority.

The experience of White students as a temporary minority is an area of study with increasing importance, especially as the number of minority students in college is

steadily increasing (Strayhorn, 2010). There is also a small but growing body of research that has focused on the experiences of Whites at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This research has shown that these students appear to experience few barriers in their adjustment, experience little to no racial discrimination on campus, and generally enter into environments that are perceived as friendly and welcoming. While this research has shown that the White students attending HBCUs are initially anxious about being in a minority role, these concerns are typically pacified by the supportive faculty and social environment (Strayhorn, 2010).

The importance of the success of students in support programs extends beyond minority racial boundaries. Because TRIO programs are designed to assist all students who fit the criteria of financial need, it is important to study how the environment of a student service that has primarily served minority students meets the needs of White students (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). In an attempt to begin filling this gap in the research, this study investigates the experience of White students in TRIO-funded programs as temporary minorities.

Understanding the Temporary Minority Status of White Students in Higher Education

First, we describe the term “temporary minority” and the potential effects on a student’s experience on campus or in particular programs within higher education. The next section delves deeper into specifics of White students’ experiences as temporary minorities in a Higher Education context. Understanding this population as a temporary minority in this setting provides a guiding framework for this study.

Defining Temporary Minority

Coined by scholars to describe a particular type of shift in group status, the term “temporary minority” is used to refer to individuals who belong to a majority group in the larger societal context, but who then enter an environment where they are identified as the minority (Hall & Closson, 2005).

In examining the temporary minority experience it is important to recognize that there are three distinct types of minorities: the autonomous, voluntary, and involuntary minority (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Autonomous minorities are people who belong to groups that are small in number. Although these groups may suffer discrimination, they are not completely dominated or oppressed by the majority group. The “caste-like,” or involuntary, minorities are those who are brought into a given environment against their own will. Lastly, the voluntary minority group consists of people who “voluntarily” enter environments where they become a part of the minority group (Ogbu & Simons, 1998), such as the participants in the study at hand.

Ogbu (1998) argues “how and why a group became a minority and the role of the dominant group in society in their acquisition of minority status” (p. 157) are what determines its voluntary or involuntary status rather than race and ethnicity. All minority groups may face certain barriers in

the higher education setting but the groups’ differing histories and self-perceptions may influence their ability to adjust socially, cope with their given barriers, and eventually overcome them. For the purpose of this research study, voluntary minority status will be utilized as a defining framework, as it has more relevance to the study and examination of the temporary minority experience.

Voluntary minorities are motivated by the possibility of better opportunities than those afforded to them in their place of origin (Ogbu, 1998). Thus, voluntary minority groups are said to more willingly accept and adapt to mainstream culture, as it is perceived to be a strategy for getting ahead in society. More often than not, especially in the higher education setting, temporary minorities fit the voluntary minority definition having made a personal choice to temporarily adopt a minority status in the hopes of receiving a better, unique and/or more affordable educational opportunity (Hall & Closson, 2005).

Based on Ogbu’s definition of a minority population, one that occupies “some form of subordinate power position in relation to another population within the same country or society” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 162), it could be inferred that the experience of being a temporary minority may not have an entirely positive effect. Some researchers hypothesize that one of the main sources of failure for students belonging to a minority group is the lack of the necessary cultural capital possessed by the majority group in a given environment.

Students have varied levels of cultural and social capital which effects their incorporation into a society (Ogbu, 1992; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). However, this is not a long-lasting condition with voluntary minority groups as the obstacles may be viewed only as temporary setbacks. Therefore, there may be motivation to overcome obstacles with the belief that the

condition will increase their chances of success (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Ogbu, 1978). Because of this, the effects of the temporary minority experience on individuals in a higher education setting have been largely proven to be positive in part because of their voluntary status (Ogbu, 1992).

Whites as Temporary Minorities in Higher Education

The White student presence at HBCUs is one example of White students as a temporary minority in Higher Education. Between the years 1976 and 1994, White student enrollment in HBCUs increased by almost 70% (Brown, 2002). White students account for 16.5% of HBCU enrollment nationally, while African American students comprise only 9.4% of the student population at White campuses (Brown, 2002). These statistics alone provide evidence for how important it is to further research White students as a temporary minority as they are pursuing this status at an ever increasing rate. Research states that there are a number of reasons White students pursue HBCUs. In addition to students choosing to attend for the purposes of diversifying their experience, White students often attend because of the low cost to attend, minority scholarships that are offered under collegiate desegregation compliance plans, and the proximity and/or programmatic offerings of the school (Brown, 2002).

White students who attend HBCUs have various factors that affect their experience on a college campus. Many White students who attend these institutions feel comfortable in their classes (Peterson & Hamrick, 2009). They do not feel the need to prove themselves as White students in the classroom for attending an HBCU in the way that students of color often feel at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Peterson & Hamrick, 2009). These students do not express any anxieties while attending

an HBCU because they generally have positive experiences within their social life (Closson & Henry, 2008). Also, White students who have active interactions with faculty through participating in activities such as asking for feedback on assignments have a raised level of satisfaction with their collegiate experience (Strayhorn, 2010). Overall, many White students view HBCUs as an opportunity to grow individually (Hall & Closson, 2005).

On the other hand, White students at HBCUs are able to identify with Black students who attend PWIs and have feelings of hyper-visibility because of their race (Peterson & Hamrick, 2009). Also, Closson and Henry (2008) explained that White students who adjust well still feel the internal pressures of not trying to racially offend their peers

There is much to be learned from exploring the White college student experience when they become temporary minorities. Though there is some literature around the experience of White students attending HBCUs, there is little research on the experience of White students who voluntarily take on the role of temporary minority status in other settings. Therefore, this study aims to explore the experience of White students as a temporary minority in programs that predominately serve racial minority students. This study focus remains an under-researched area in the higher education and temporary minority literature (Closson & Henry, 2008).

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were undergraduate students at a large four-year and predominately White public research institution in the Midwest. Specifically, the focus was on self-identified White or Caucasian students who participated in a

majority African American TRIO-funded program. All current undergraduate White students who participated in this program were eligible. In total six students participated in the study. All six students, three males, with pseudonyms Bill, Paul, and Steve and three females, with pseudonyms Brooke, Rachel, and Jane were first year students who completed the Summer Bridge component of the program a few months prior to the study. As a requirement of the program, all student participants were first generation college students, demonstrate financial need, and maintained at least a 2.0 grade point average during their summer tenure.

During the summer before their first year in college all of the TRIO students experienced the Summer Bridge component of the program, while living with other TRIO students in the same residence hall. They also took six-week clustered courses together during the summer for credit that was applied to their overall grade point average.

Data Collection

Snowball sampling was utilized in order to make preliminary contact with qualified participants. This method of sampling was useful when the population that is being studied is a "hidden population"; as the case here with a small number of White students in a predominately racial minority student program (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). Once the preliminary White students had been contacted via personal communication, they were asked to recommend White peers who had also participated in the program.

After participants for this study had been identified, semi-structured focus groups were used in order to investigate the experience of White students as a temporary minority within the TRIO program. Focus groups were used as they permit the formation of a group dynamic and allow the participants to potentially recollect shared

perceptions and experiences (Kaase & Harshbarger, 1993). Semi-structured focus groups provided in-depth insights into how the participants felt about a certain topic. In this case, they were given the opportunity to reflect on and provide interpretations of their experience as temporary minorities in this TRIO funded program, and why they felt this way (Bertrand, et al. 1992). Utilizing focus groups allowed findings to be presented in a narrative form with direct voice from the participants.

Protocol

The facilitator of each focus group guided the participants through the discussion by probing their experiences, attitudes and behaviors as a temporary minority in a TRIO-funded program, while being a good listener (Kaase & Harshbarger, 1993). During the facilitator's questioning, a note taker was used and employed the "inventory of points discussed" system for which to take notes (Bertrand et al., 1992). With this system, the note taker writes "down each question from the protocol given at the top of a separate sheet of paper" and each time the conversation turns to this topic the note taker "writes down the main points made by each participant" (Bertrand et al., 1992, p.203). Utilizing this system allowed the vast amounts of information collected from the focus groups to be compiled in a manageable form for analysis (Bertrand et al., 1992).

Participants in the study attended one of three focus groups. Due to the small number of participants the focus groups turned out to be semi-structured focus groups with two participants, a facilitator and a note taker. Each one lasted between 30 and 60 minutes to limit lack of participation after attention spans of participants had been reached (Kaase & Harshbarger, 1993).

Each focus group session was audio recorded, transcribed and facilitated by two

researchers, one of whom was tasked with taking notes of the participants' discussion and nonverbal behavior and the other with facilitating the discussion with the participants (Hall & Closson, 2005). Focus groups met in residence hall conference rooms, which were chosen to be neutral locations free from distractions where participants could feel at ease.

Data Analysis

Once each focus group was conducted and notes were gathered, both the note taker and facilitator began analysis immediately. Both researchers listened to the tape in order to clarify certain issues or to "confirm that all the main points were included in the notes"; this approach is known as the "note-expansion approach" (Bertrand, 1992, p. 202). This approach for data analysis was selected for its ability to save time and allow the researchers to retain the key points discussed during the focus groups (Bertrand, 1992.) After the data was transcribed, the constant comparative method, which uses an inductive process for forming categories (Schwitzer, 1999), was used to determine categories of themes.

Five key themes were determined from the data: 1) initial fear of the unknown/unfamiliar 2) the role of the environment 3) social economic status as a unifier 4) postive overall experience 5) diversity benefits. There were varying degrees of experiential influence by each student within the determined themes. The researchers believe this was due to a range in the participant's exposure with people of different diverse backgrounds other than their own.

Findings

Initial Fear of the Unknown/ Unfamiliar

Steve felt anxious despite his previous relationships with Black students in high school mentioning, "I came from a city where

I was a minority. White people were less dominant than Black people or Hispanics. So the program wasn't a culture shock, the biggest problem for me was actually getting to talk to people." Steve was unable to identify if his fear of talking to people related to his new surroundings, his status as a temporary minority within the program, or some other factor.

At HBCUs, White students' initial expectations of feeling unsupported and outcasted were not the reality once they entered the environment. Contrary to their expectation, they quickly became comfortable (Hall & Closson, 2005). This feeling of comfort was felt by Jane after entering the TRIO program. Despite her initial fear of violence, she soon became at ease in her new settings. Jane went on in her focus group to later state:

The first day I was crying like 'Mom don't leave me here, I'm going to get beat up.' I wanted to go home so bad. But then I was sitting there talking with two Black people the second day and they were the sweetest people and I realized 'I'm going to love this.'

Initial fears for students can also stem from the stereotypes they hold regarding Black students, as well as a fear of what Black students will think about them as Whites. This threat can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists. Where bad stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype. For those who identify with the group to which the stereotype is relevant, this dilemma can be self-threatening (Quaye, Tambascia, & Talesh, 2009). This is damaging because it affects the most academically motivated and successful students even when they do not believe the accuracy of the stereotype (Quaye, Tambascia, & Talesh, 2009). White

students in the focus groups found that these stereotypes had an effect on their initial experiences in the program and that the program coordinators recognized these issues and initiated a workshop to help break down these early social barriers for the students. Brooke and Rachel described the situation together in their focus group. Brooke first stated that,

I feel like in the beginning people kind of stick together because everyone was nervous but I feel like the White people were more nervous. And then we had that [diversity program]. People ended up talking and saying stuff back and forth. The Black girls' group was like 'people are afraid to approach us because we're not shy generally' and then I remember someone from the White girls group was like 'yea, that's kind of true' and they said a few words back and forth and I was like 'wow'. But then at the end they were like 'yea'; they accepted it and they understood what each other were saying at the end.

Rachel continued the sentiment stating that,

That was helpful too because you presented the stereotypes about your group and then you said which ones were most reasonable and which ones were most hurtful and then other groups were like 'oh I didn't realize saying that or assuming that hurt you.' Kids really just took it seriously and it helped.

The ability to express what was hurtful to the students acted as both a therapeutic moment for the student expressing the sentiment, and informative for those students of other races who were able to listen to their stories. This exercise helped the White students get past their initial fears and

incorporate themselves into the group dynamic of the program.

The majority of the student participants in the focus groups expressed some sentiment of initial fear when entering the TRIO program. Some were able to equate it to being a temporary minority, while others either could not express the reason or related it to another apprehension. The students who expressed this initial fear all felt their anxiety relieve itself; many of them early on within the program. Their social interactions, academic experiences, and involvement in workshops with staff members allowed them to move past these fears and have generally positive experiences with other students, faculty, and staff members.

The Role of the Environment

One of the more prominent themes from the conversations with the White student participants was that their setting determined the type of interactions they had with other members of the program. While there were many different examples that came up in the interviews, the two settings that were most prominent can be broken down into academic settings and social settings.

The academic setting was instrumental in the student experience and their interactions with others. Many of the students spoke of the group work and designed projects where they had to work with students of different racial backgrounds. Most of these students seemed positive about these experiences and the opportunities they had to get to know other students because of these academic activities. For example, Steve said,

You're here with 300 other kids who you have no choice but to talk to and have classes where we were in groups. I was able to broaden out and meet other people because we had to meet and work

with each other... Having open discussions in classes helped us learn to talk to each other.

Some of the students felt as though these designed interactions were somewhat awkward, but ultimately led to a higher level of learning how to interact with others who thought differently, and the value of working with others that they normally would not have. Rachel thought that over time, the awkwardness of the environment was alleviated and she felt as though she was able to share her thoughts and feelings with those in the class.

The one area that was not completely positive had to deal with the forced nature of the interactions. Paul said, "In the math class there wasn't a lot of student interaction. The teacher kind of tried to make it happen by doing group assignments but honestly it just turned into me doing the math and that's it...but I learned a lot more from the students in other classes." A similar sentiment was shared in a separate interview by Bill who said, "Each of the teachers tried to set up groups. It was nice because you would get to know people and then talk with your other classmates and get to know them."

After all that was said about the interactions in the academic settings, the underlying theme was that these opportunities became a great neutralizer of the racial dynamics of the program. To illustrate this point, she shared an experience stating that,

I think socially, being White, it changed my experience because I was more apt to hanging out with the White students. I don't think it was just me. I think a lot of the Black students too hung out with groups of Black students. So socially I think it played a part but academically, like in the classroom, you were there learning and writing things according to what you knew not based on race. So I

think socially it [race] did play a role and academically it didn't.

Ultimately, the designed interaction in the academic setting was seen as a positive outcome for the majority of the students interviewed. This idea seemed to be shared by many of the interviewees. It seemed apparent for them that the academic setting was a great neutralizer of race and background and let the students see each other for who they are, not on the basis of preconceived stereotypes.

While the academic setting was valuable in encouraging interaction between the students, the social setting appears to be an even more valuable experience for many of the students. Brooke said,

For me it was so much fun. After we get out of class I'd either hang out in the lobby or go to my boyfriend's room and chill with him and his roommate or we would go down and do stuff or go out to eat... It always felt like a family/party type thing. My current best friend is someone I met in the program; we hang out every day and we're going to live together next year so socially it [the program] was awesome.

An interesting contradiction was found in the organized parties put on during the summer. Some of the students seemed to really enjoy them, others didn't really feel like they belonged, and others simply didn't go, either to get caught up on their homework or their home was close enough to campus that they would just go home for the weekend. Bill in particular really enjoyed the parties. He states,

I actually enjoyed the parties. I thought they were really interesting. Cause they're [Black students] finally the majority and you're [White students] the

minority so you're kind of standing out. So I feel like they kind of notice you and kind of want to interact with you instead of people around them. So you kind of stood out and then you get to know more people through that.

Paul describes a contradictory opinion;

So they [the program] threw a lot of parties but honestly it wasn't really my crowd so I just didn't get out. So I was walking into one of the dances and I was like literally the only White guy and I just did one sweep through the place like in a circle and just hopped right back out and was like this is awkward.

As illustrated, the setting of the interactions appeared to be very significant in the overall experience of the students. The academic setting created a variety of opportunities for the students to interact with others that they might not normally have considered. There was also a strong sense that based on these interactions, the racial factor was greatly neutralized, at least in this setting, and the students were able to learn from others as individuals, and not as specific members of any stereotype. As would be expected in any similar scenario, there were those who thought these forced interactions were awkward and apparently could have done without them, but the underlying feeling was that these situations created opportunities for interaction that would not have been readily available otherwise.

The social interactions might be a little more telling, at least in regards to the variety of the experiences had by some of the students. There were a multitude of activities both formally planned and random gatherings. Some of the students spoke very highly of these opportunities to learn about others from different racial backgrounds on a more informal basis.

Socio-economic Status as a Unifier

One of the most unifying themes that became clear throughout the focus groups was the commonality of socioeconomic status (SES). Many of the students were able to bond with others based on coming from similar backgrounds. Steve said, "A lot of people from the program are low-income and the parents didn't go to college, they came from rough areas." Even though there was frustration expressed by some at this stereotype, many felt as though it helped some students come out and become a little more involved than they otherwise may have. To further illustrate this point, Steve said,

People in the program are people that I can really connect with. My family didn't have a lot of money and everyone in the program all went through the same thing. We weren't wealthy and we didn't let that affect us. Now, most of the people I talk to are from the program, a couple people on my floor and my roommate.

For this student, the fact that he came from a similar economic situation as many others in the program helped him to make friends in the program and ultimately become more involved. This concept was one of the reasons that so many of the students ended up feeling very close to the program. A female student best summarizes this idea in saying,

I honestly miss the program so much...If I could have it ideally to be here at [this institution] like it was in the program I would have it that way. I feel the honestly that's my family here away from home. I haven't connected with anyone here [the institution]... There are so many people here with money that have their nose up and the people in the program were so down to earth. They've been beaten down; they know what it's

like to come from a struggling home. And that was the best gift to come through that program, I'm so glad I did it.

Positive Overall Experience

In addressing the statement, "Tell me about your general experience in the program" the White undergraduate students in this study expressed positive feelings across the board although initially apprehensive of being in a predominantly Black environment. When reflecting back, participants heavily utilized the word 'opportunity' in reiterations of their positive experience and each stated in one way or another how privileged they felt to have had the temporary minority experience. Bill stated the following:

It was definitely different than where I went to school. I was the minority this time. But it was nice to explore and get to know the other cultures, the other schools, the other people. I liked it, personally. I could do stuff I never actually did in high school. It was a good experience just to get to know everyone. I feel like more White people should try and experience this, just like a different side of the U.S. There were also Hispanics in that program, more than usual and it was also nice to experience their programs. I went to some Latino things with the people that I met and it was cool too. I feel like more Whites should try to go outside their boundaries, because [the institution] is mainly White, and go to these events because you get a different perspective.

The tone of the participants' responses mirrored that of the participants in Hall and Closson's (2005) study on the temporary minority experience of White students attending HBCUs; opportunity was also identified as one of the focus group themes

with the White students defining opportunity as "having a unique experience to grow personally" (p. 37).

Other factors that contributed to participants' positive experience were academic and social in nature. Academically, strong faculty and staff support were acknowledged by participants to have had an impact on their academics and personal development. From efforts to provide an environment conducive to learning and creating a support system to being highly accessible and willing to help, both faculty and staff were contributing factors toward their positive temporary minority experience. Steve affirms this finding by asserting that:

I had two teachers that really helped me. One teacher gave me a support system because he knew I wasn't social. I was really drawn back in my classes. And he told me "if you never find anyone to talk to I can talk to you" because he had gone through the same issues. He pushed me to talk and called my name in class.

Additionally, when asked to relay their positive experiences as a temporary minority, respondents often relayed fond memories related to instances when they were made to feel like a novelty in various social settings. This is apparent in responses such as Brooke's recount:

I think more people knew the White peoples' name because it was like you stood out. Like I remember I know I pass people now, there'll be Black people passing me and they'll be like "hey" and I'll be like "hey" but I don't remember your name, I don't remember seeing you. That happens to me a lot. So I think you stick out a little bit more because you're a minority...

Despite some difficult experiences mentioned by this study's participants regarding meeting new people, these students did not allow it to significantly affect their overall experience in the program. Instead, some respondents chose to cope with the situation by "escaping" their temporary minority status for brief periods throughout the program whether it'd be physically leaving the environment where they were a temporary minority or surrounding themselves with individuals of the same race. Rachel shared her feelings. Below are recounts of some of these instances:

I didn't meet a lot of the students [in the program] but I was fine with that in that I worked hard on my studies. No, I didn't go to the social hours in the evenings. I live really close; I live about 15 minutes away...so I went home every weekend. I went home and did laundry and all that good stuff.

This example illustrates respondents' general maintenance of a positive attitude towards their voluntary adoption of temporary minority status as influenced by the "back home" comparison; they view it as a chance they would not otherwise have attained from back home (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Hence, some temporary minorities were more willing to adapt to the mainstream culture because they did not imagine that it would harm their group identity and considered it an additive that would enable them to succeed further in society (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Diversity Benefits

The final theme that arose from our study was the diversity awareness that White participants of the program gained through the experience as a temporary minority. Though the degrees to which each student

expanded in their knowledge and understanding of diversity varied, all the participants of this study felt that they gained a better awareness of racial/ethnic issues and understanding of their minority peers.

Several of the participants stated that when they arrived to the program, they were very aware that they were in the minority. Students stated that in the beginning people kind of stuck together because everyone was nervous but felt like the White people were more nervous than others who were in the program. Another student, Brooke, recalled her first day in the classroom and how she, for the first time, noticed race ratios in the class. "At first I remember sitting down in one of the classes I went to I looked around and I counted how many people were in the class and then I counted how many White people were in the class compared to the Black people and it was like three to ten, it was so different." For several of the participants, this was the first time they had become aware of their own race in relation to others and what it felt like to be placed in a temporary minority status.

Participants also discussed how, over time, they began to expand their horizons of interactions with students of color and learn to enjoy being in the presence of diverse students. Here, Steve shared his initial experience in the program: "I put my guard up a lot, but by the end of the summer I made friends and I still talk to most of them. It was a great experience" This was an area of growth for our White participants who all expressed preconceived notions of "others" and what the experience would be like based off their own stereotypes. Steve further explains: "I felt like we had nothing in common (Black students) but when I came down here I found we had a lot in common, it was eye opening to see stereotypes not play out".

Previous studies have shown that students who participate in frequent

conversations on racial and ethnic issues and who socialize with someone from another racial/ethnic group are more likely to report increased levels of racial and cultural awareness, promotion of racial understanding and openness (Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, & Terenzini, 1996). Several of the participants exuded this development of racial awareness and heightened obligation to stand up for inequality of their peers. Jane recalls an experience she had while visiting a shopping mall with a group of her Black peers she had met in the program:

I didn't realize how much people stereotype Blacks. I went to the mall with a bunch of my Black friends and they were like that lady is looking at me like I'm about to steal something and she (the lady) really was! They said its okay I'm used to it, and I was like why? If someone was staring at me like that I'd be pretty mad. It got me to the realization of why they (Blacks) are outspoken. They get stereotyped against so much and I would be angry if people starred at me like that and were so rude too.

Similarly, Brooke recalls the way the group of people she was with downtown were perceived by people in the community "When we go out, if it's me with one other White person and like five to ten Black people would go out, like they wouldn't stare at me but they'd be like looking like "that's odd." Moreover, many participants reported that the more interaction and contact they had with students of color, the more they began to change their own personal biases and embrace differences. They felt that being in a program where they served as the temporary minority allowed them to see common misconceptions of people abolished. Steve explained how "the best part of being

around large amounts of Black people was getting to know them. Now when I go out and I see someone being stereotyped, I don't have a problem saying something to them or telling them how wrong they are, they just really need to get to know them,". With some of the participants, we even saw a disconnection between friendships that had formed with high school peers due to lack of understanding of the participants' new appreciation and acceptance of various cultures and races. Here Jane reflects on her relationship with a high school friend with whom she had come to the program with and how their relationship changed: "I made so many other friends we didn't relate anymore, I grew so much through the program by learning about other people's lives, it just really touched me."

Findings such as these suggest that institutions that host programs such as this TRIO program, that cause White students to serve as temporary minorities, create settings that foster development and growth for White students and their diversity awareness (Pacarella et al, 1996). All of the participants had positive statements regarding how they felt about being temporary minorities and how beneficial the overall experience was for them. Several stated that they had continued to foster the relationships they formed during the summer bridge component of the program. Jane sums it up best with the following:

The program changed my life, I love it. It really opened my eyes to how it feels to be in the minority and to be the one that's like getting judged and looked at like they're different. It made me think about my views on other people and how it must feel for them. I feel that honestly that [the program] is my family here away from home. That was the best gift to come through that program I'm so glad I did it.

Discussion

It should not come as a surprise that White students felt some initial anxiety about being the minority in the program. Many of the students expressed feelings of fear, violence, or not fitting in during the beginnings of their experience. Comparable research has shown that White students who have taken on a temporary minority role at HBCUs have reported that prior to starting classes they were nervous and apprehensive about attending a historically Black institution (Hall & Closson, 2005). Other students were concerned that they would be seen only as White students and not be recognized for their other attributes. Some students also feared that faculty members may be very into race and wouldn't like them (Hall & Closson, 2005). These sentiments were echoed by White students participating in the predominantly Black TRIO program in the given study.

It was interesting to discover patterns among those interviewed as they discussed their experiences of being a temporary minority. One of the most promising findings was the break down of traditionally held stereotypes among those interviewed. It was apparent that as the students spent time as a minority within the program they gained the ability to empathize with their Black counterparts.

Much of this success needed to be attributed to the faculty and staff of the program. There was no evidence of preferential treatment or bias among those interviewed. These personnel associated with the program were apparently instrumental in facilitating discussions and providing opportunities that forced students to leave their comfort zone and interact with others. As this occurred, the students found themselves relating to other students regardless of racial background.

As would be expected, the context of the interactions should be considered. There was a much greater range of experiences regarding the social aspect of the program where interactions were not required, as opposed to the academic setting where everyone had a common purpose. Overall, it was interesting to see the agreement among the students interviewed that they had a very positive experience in the program, especially as temporary minorities. The students were generally able to gain a better perspective toward a more diverse student population and were able to see the value of diversity in their educational experience.

Limitations

A primary limitation of this study is the small number of respondents. Given the small sample size of the study, the transferability of the findings from this study is limited. Another factor to consider was that the students who participated may have been more inclined to do so as a result of their positive experience within the program. Consequently, the results possibly paint a picture that does not accurately reflect the opinions of other White students in the program.

Additionally, contact with the participants was one time only. With a limited timeline, the data collection phase was highly constrained. To more confidently apply the themes found in this study to other students, further study is needed with additional samples. The focus group format used required participants to share experiences in small groups comprising of only one other woman or man. Perhaps a follow-up study that relies on larger same-gender compositions may produce new, additive, or modified information that to our findings.

Implications/Conclusions

The research findings leave a number of inquiries that have yet to be explored regarding White students in TRIO-funded programs. Given the results of this study, several implications have sprouted in order to encourage researchers to further explore these students' experiences in a more direct and specific way. Having a better understanding of the White student experience in TRIO-funded programs has led to a more in-depth comprehension of how areas within the program that are meeting the needs of this population. Researching the White student experience as a temporary minority in these programs has also brought to light potential areas of improvement that may enhance the overall experience of these students. Specifically addressing the experience of White students in these programs in social and academic settings, there is much to be explored.

Students in the focus groups touched upon their social experience in the program. The level of engagement between students varied but with further research done to investigate this phenomenon, practitioners and faculty alike could reveal a multitude of different factors that play a role in the student's engagement levels. Because this component of the student experience was addressed in the focus groups, it proves to have quite a bit of relevance to the White student overall experience in TRIO programs. In order to better understand this student population in these settings, it would be crucial to research this area of interest further and more thoroughly.

The concept of the "supportive campus environment" was evidenced in the focus group sessions; students often mentioned the communal aspects of their environment. The relationship shared between the student and the setting is not something to be taken lightly. A student's surroundings have a great impact on their attitude and can have an even

greater impact on their performance in these TRIO programs. This should be taken into consideration by practitioners and faculty members.

Given these implications for further research, there are a number of conclusions that have been made regarding some practical ways in which appropriate personnel could increase their efforts to meet the needs of White students as temporary minorities. Increasing direct outreach to the White student population could aid in growing the numbers of this student population within TRIO-funded programs. The enrollment of White students into these programs can aid in their overall student experience with an exposure to diversity.

Assessing the needs of the White students as individuals can aid in addressing pressing issues right from the beginning. This can be conducted by administering a survey to the students prior to or upon their arrival to the program. Giving students the opportunity to express their wants and needs may help to put students at ease, potentially lessening the initial fear they experience. In doing so, the appropriate TRIO program personnel at their respective institutions can have student-centered support for the decisions made in the environments they facilitate.

Overall, the results of our study outline a number of factors to consider when working with White students in TRIO programs. It is important to recognize the benefits inhabited by those who participate in these programs. White students have great and proven potential to benefit from racially diverse experiences. The findings of this study can surely be transposed in order to address how the White student experience can benefit minority students as well. Furthermore, practitioners, administrators, and faculty personnel associated with these programs can be assured that all parties can be better served once the student experience

is understood. This study aims to aid these individuals in gaining that understanding. Knowing what the students experience and

knowing what they need help with, TRIO-funded programs can better serve their student populations on the whole.

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