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Inclusion and Belonging in Irish Higher Education for Black and Minority Ethnic Students.

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Abstract.

Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an analytical prism, this study interrogates the sense of belonging and inclusion experienced by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students on one higher education campus in Ireland. The most important story told within the study is as simple as it is complicated. The simple part is that the BME students felt that the campus was inclusive and that they experienced a sense of belonging. The complicated part is that the findings are premised in a normative assumption of whiteness as evidenced by numerous and incremental moments of exclusion in the daily experience of microaggressions, the mispronunciation of name, curriculum and pedagogical exclusions. The article uses this case to reflect on how the higher education experience can be made more inclusive by developing a race consciousness to embrace campus diversity, minimise microaggressions and create inclusive learning environments. Suggestions for inclusive practice are considered in the conclusion.

Keywords: Belonging and inclusion on campus; BME students; Critical Race Theory; Higher Education; Microaggressions.

1. Introduction.

Central to this research are the voices and experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students on campus. In recent years higher education has seen greater diversity among undergraduate students in universities in Ireland (Heinz & Keane, 2018; Higham, 2017). However, limited Irish research exists investigating BME students' experience in higher education (Darby, 2020; Ní Chonaill, 2018). This study explores how BME students feel the campus includes or excludes them, their sense of belonging on campus and students'

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perceptions of inclusion in learning environments. The article proceeds with an overview of the demographics and positionality of the researcher that influenced the study; a review of the scholarship on developing a race consciousness from Critical Race Theory (CRT); the research methods and methodology undertaken; the findings and discussions that unmask the complex and nuanced experiences of inclusion and exclusion for BME students and ends with conclusions on key challenges and suggestions for inclusive practice.

1.1 Setting the Scene.

1.1.1 Demographic Influences.

In the last two decades Ireland's population has become more diverse regarding national and cultural origins due to rapid immigration[1]. Driven by its strategic intent[2], the university embraces diversity as a strength and a selling point of studying at Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin). The Blanchardstown campus of TU Dublin is situated in County Fingal - an ethnically diverse region with non-Irish nationals accounting for 18.3% of the population[3]. Motivated by changes in the student demographics on campus, this research aims to illuminate the issues and impacts that these changes are having on BME students' experience in particular.

1.1.2 Positionality of the Researcher.

Concentrating on the development of a race consciousness from the theoretical nuances of CRT has been a challenge in this research. This excavated deeper underlying assumptions regarding higher education as a racialised form of knowledge and questions my position of privilege in the academy as a practitioner-researcher. Acutely more aware of my White privilege and how this makes it easier for me to belong and feel included (D'Angelo, 2011), throughout the fieldwork, I felt that I represented the White academy and the '*good White person*' wanting to research BME students. I epitomised White privilege in those moments.

In addition, ethical clearance for the project was a protracted process, with a key ethical dilemma emerging in relation to the fact that I was researching some of my own students in

[1] Central Statistics Office (2017). *Chapter 5 Diversity,* Dublin: Central Statistics Office. Available: https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter_5_Diversity.pdf

[2] Strategic Intent 2030-TU Dublin

[3] https://consult.fingal.ie/ga/system/files/materials/1016/585-Fingal%20Socio-Economic%20Profile.pdf

the fieldwork. For me this illuminated the power dynamics inherent in an additional research relationship between my students and I, where I was asking students to share very personal experiences which are not normally given voice in learning spaces. I wanted to make sure that I respected their contribution to this research and that their voice was captured in the findings, discussion and conclusions. Ethical approval was granted for the research study in accordance with institutional requirements.

I recognise that as a White, female middle-class researcher I lack the cultural literacy to grasp the experience of BME students on campus. I wanted to create conditions so that I could ask questions in a supportive environment that was safe and welcoming, allowing them to communicate in as open a way as possible. From my perspective the students appeared relaxed during the focus groups and interviews, enthused to talk about their experiences, and many of them they said that they had never been asked about this before.

2. Theoretical Perspectives: Engaging with the Literature.

The timely publication of Akel's (2019) report on the experiences of BME students at Goldsmith's College, University of London shows the prevalence of the role of race and ethnicity as a global experience. This is further highlighted by subsequent events and movements globally in 2020 in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter movement. Little research exists documenting the lived experiences of BME students in Irish higher education institutions and an understanding of the components of the campus environment that affect a sense of belonging for BME students remains elusive. In this section I review the scholarship pertaining to BME students in higher education from the following perspectives; a contextual understanding from dynamic diversity; the nuanced and complex reality of inclusion and belonging on campus for BME students, developing a race consciousness through a CRT lens, and the psychological construct of microaggressions.

2.1 A Note on Terminology.

Drawing from a contemporary literature base in describing minorities in higher education (Akel, 2019; Arday, 2018; Bhopal &Chapman, 2019), in this study the BME term refers to Black and Asian ethnicities as self-identified by the research participants, comprising sixteen of the

nineteen students interviewed. The term is contested in the literature as it attempts to capture diverse experiences of students in one term that centres the racialised experiences of students from minority ethnic backgrounds (Kitching, 2015; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2010). The term '*global majority*' is also increasingly used and refers to people who are Black, African, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or, have been racialised as *'ethnic minorities*,' but who now are the global majority, representing approximately 80% of the world's population globally (Campbell-Stevens, 2021).

2.2 Dynamic Diversity: A Contextual Understanding.

Dynamic diversity provides the boundary for the theoretical approaches used to explore belonging and inclusion for BME students on campus. Critical mass is a helpful term in understanding the conditions needed to harness the educational benefits of diversity; "*the point at which there are enough minorities in a setting, like a school or workplace, that individual minorities no longer feel uncomfortable*" (Steel, 2010, p. 135). An alternative term for 'critical mass,' is dynamic diversity which requires a contextual understanding of diversity within educational institutions, providing a deeper comprehension than numbers alone (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014). Evidence of dynamic diversity that is context specific to this research includes the intersection of national policy and diversity initiatives in higher education (macro), institutional approach on campus (meso) and day-to-day conditions for students (micro).

2.3 Inclusion and Belonging in Higher Education – Nuanced and Complex.

Inclusion and belonging on campus is a notable discourse within higher education policy in Ireland, (dynamic diversity at the maco level); "[*T]he system must be open to and supportive of all learners*" (HEA 2016, p.25) and "*to promote an institutional habitus that is more open and welcoming to a diversity of students*" (NFETL 2015, p.22). Inclusion and belonging are not the same thing. An inclusive campus relates to compositional diversity that displays a proportional representation of different groups on campus in numbers. Belonging takes into consideration the daily and weekly experiences of BME students in traversing the campus culture. Belonging can be masked as inclusion if attention is only paid to compositional diversity which fails to take into account the daily experiences of BME students in navigating the college campus (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014; Steel, 2010). While the numbers are an indication of ethnic and cultural diversity, belonging on campus captures the experiences of those who '*fit in*' and "*Universities*

can help improve a sense of belonging by setting clear goals, fostering inclusive environments, and challenging negative stereotypes about certain groups" (Frenk, 2016, p. 3). An inclusive campus is one that relates in a positive manner to a diverse cohort of students' '*sense of belonging*' which is a complex construct that relies heavily on students' perceptions of the educational environment, especially their relationships with other students (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015, p. 2). Bhopal and Pitkin (2020) caution against the promotion of a university as inclusive, by showcasing awards such as the [UK] Race Equality Charter mark (REC) on websites and promotional materials, with the reality lacking any substantial change.

Students from minority backgrounds often experience feelings of isolation and exclusion in the predominantly White environments of many higher education campuses (Jenkins, Tichavakunda & Coles, 2021). Meaningful engagement with diversity on campus constitutes an important means of preparing college graduates to participate and flourish in an increasingly complex and diverse society (Gurin et al., 2002). Employers have also come to realise that they will be employing more graduates from minority ethnic groups (Joseph, 2020a). Studies have shown that interacting with different ethnic groups is a potent way for learners to augment the educational benefits of diversity (Rhodes & Douglas Lees, 2017).

2.4 Developing a Race Consciousness grounded in CRT.

CRT in this study is used to develop a race consciousness that analyses the experiences and outcomes of BME students on campus. A compelling bedrock of literature exists spanning the last three decades on CRT (Rollock & Gilborn, 2011; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas1995). This study connects with the tenets of (1) counter-storytelling by centralising the experiential knowledge of marginalised people (Joseph, 2020b); (2) the permanence of racism by challenging the dominant ideology of White privilege in the academy (Andrews, 2019) and (3) the social construction of race of othering based on biological differences (McGinnity et al., 2018).

The literature on racialisation assists in illuminating the specific experiences of students of African descent because society racialises their biological attributes in ways that White students from European cultures do not experience (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012). Racialisation is also in evidence in the academy in what we teach, and how we teach in ways that are predominantly Eurocentric in approach (Andrews, 2019; hooks, 2012). Campaigns like "*Why is My Curriculum White?*" and "*Rhodes Must Fall*" galvanised by students' reactions to the Eurocentric nature of

university knowledge, has led to a movement to decolonise, or at the very least diversify the curriculum (Darby & Dowling, 2021; Charles, 2019). At the core of these campaigns is the deep dissatisfaction with the lack of race equality across the curricula (Pimblott, 2019; Knudsen & Andersen, 2019). BME students have "*come to internalise the white gaze, a gaze that…has negative implications for how they see their own epistemic credibility*" by accepting the normalcy of White knowledge production and sources in the curriculum (Yancy, 2019, p. 32). The university's role in perpetuating Eurocentric paradigms has been made visible by these movements and includes renewed calls for the development of alternative knowledge sources and paradigms (Pimblott, 2019; Fitzsimons, 2019). Including diverse voices that have been silenced due to "*phallocentric, Eurocentric, xenophobic educational environments is "central to transformative education*" (Rowan, 2019, p. 98).

CRT inside the classroom requires engaging in pedagogy that brings race and racism to the fore. Lynn's Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) is defined "*as an analysis of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination in education that relies mostly upon the perceptions, experiences and counter-hegemonic practices of educators of color*" and champions CRP practices that have the potential to dismantle dominant knowledge claims in favour of alternative epistemologies (Lynn, 2004, p. 154). Solórzano &Yosso (2002) propose a Critical Race Curriculum (CRC) in education that acknowledges the tenets of CRT and allows educators to historicise and contextualise. CRT's counter storytelling provides a voice for the lived experiences of ethnically and culturally diverse minorities who often struggle to be heard within the dominant group (Joseph, 2020b).

In transforming the curriculum there can be concerns from the academy about the '*watering-down'* of the curriculum when integrating diversity into the content along with faculty lacking the training and knowledge on how to integrate diversity into the curriculum (Ukpokodu 2010). Additional concerns are academics' beliefs that students' responsibility for academic literacy rests with the individual (Benzie, 2010) and a debate among academics that all students should be treated the same regardless of their ethnicity (Leach, 2011). Our diverse student population presents a challenge for us to see the White landscape as the hegemonic norm, and the tension lies in making an academic home where everyone belongs and diversity is the norm. The larger the gap between a student's cultural norms and the educational space they occupy in order to learn, then the greater the disconnection for those from minority cultures while advancing the dominant culture (Ahmed, 2012).

2.5 The Psychological Construct of Microaggressions.

Sue et al., (2007) define racial microaggressions as "*brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group*" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). The most harmful microaggressions occur between those who hold power and those who are most disempowered (Nadal, 2011). The research demonstrates that microaggressions have a negative impact for ethnic minorities concerning psychological distress, depression and anxiety and physical health (Mekawi & Todd, 2018; Nadal et al., 2014). Sue et al., (2007) categorised the aggressions as microassaults - a verbal or non-verbal attack that is not meant to be hurtful; microinsults - communications that are rude and insensitive to an individual's identify or ethnicity and microinvalidations - excluding, negating or nullifying a person based on their ethnicity.

An individual experience of being on the receiving end of a microaggression is not necessarily striking when viewed as an isolated incident. It is however their slow accumulation over time that creates a marginalised experience and can make the person feel like a perpetual foreigner by excluding, negating or nullifying a person based on their ethnicity (Devos & Banaji, 2005). In this paper the microaggressions experienced focus on the context of the campus environment enabling a theoretical depth and systemic analysis from CRT, which critics like Lilienfeld (2017) contend is lacking in current psychological approaches to microaggressions.

The rationale for focusing on the scholarship reviewed above illuminates many factors that may influence a sense of inclusion and belonging on campus for BME students. Beyond the contributions of each article reviewed and critiqued, if read collectively, when a campus is truly inclusive it can then state a claim to excellence in diversity.

3. A Summary of Methods and Methodology.

"*Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them*" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). The fieldwork involved focus groups and interviews with participants. Thematic analysis was used as the methodology for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data, organising and describing data within a data set in rich detail and in interpreting the various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Using qualitative data analysis software

(NVivo), the analysis involved searching for themes which was achieved after several iterations of the interactions of text, code and themes from the study.

3.1 Sampling.

The sampling approaches used during the fieldwork were purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012). Purposive sampling is deliberate as it is based on participants for the research that have particular characteristics. These students self-identified as not being from the mainstream/majority student population on campus which is currently White-Irish. All participants were undergraduate students who had been studying on campus for at least one year. After initial recruitment of participants, they were asked if others that they knew would be interested in being interviewed. This snowball sampling approach proved invaluable for increasing the number of student participants for the research. The fieldwork took place prior to the rapid pivot to online teaching due to the Covid-19 global pandemic.

3.2 Research Participants.

Nineteen undergraduate students, across the campus and disciplines, participated in focus groups and interviews for this study in 2019. These students self-identified their cultural and ethnic origin as other than White Irish. Eleven of the students identified as female and eight identified as male. Two were born in Ireland and ten have lived in Ireland for more than eleven years. Responses from sixteen of the nineteen students who identified as BME are included in the findings and discussion section.

3.3 Focus Groups and Interviews.

The fieldwork involved inviting students on campus to participate in a focus group/interview through the promotion of my research at a strategic location on campus - the canteen - at focal break times. Students who agreed to participate in the research were asked to attend one focus group/interview. Focus groups as a technique helped me to understand why the students felt the way they do about inclusion and exclusion on campus (Bryman, 2012). Madriz (2000) advances the benefits of focus groups in allowing voices of marginalised groups to surface as participants will control the direction of the session. Most students opted for a focus group setting. Two interviews were arranged with students individually due to their availability. The focus groups and interviews were conversational in nature and designed to put the participants at ease in a familiar setting by booking meeting rooms that are used by students on campus. At

times during the interview, I used the laddering technique (Price, 2002), to explore responses more deeply and to draw the participant out on something, by asking for a specific example or a time when something like that happened.

4. Findings and Discussion.

The findings revealed subtle but persistent and deeply granular experiences of exclusion and difference. It was only by re-engaging with the literature and developing a greater race consciousness and consideration of the dynamics of inclusion and belonging that I began to interpret the findings. This incremental re-adjustment in my focus made me reflect on the students' experiences on campus more deeply. The discussion of the findings is presented across three broad themes of: belonging on campus, unmasking microaggressions and inclusive learning environments.

4.1 Belonging on Campus.

The research unveils a campus where the student participants say that they belong (all student participants replied in the affirmative that they felt they belonged), representing dynamic diversity at the meso level. However, engaging with tenets of CRT as a framework of analysis, the findings uncovered complexities, contradictions and nuances on the meaning of '*fitting in*' and belonging that was underpinned by a race consciousness. For some of our BME students of African and Asian heritage, when they were asked if they had made changes to belong, they were chameleons of sorts as they made changes to belong to their environment depending on who they were with. This is evidenced in their navigation of two cultures on campus; the White majority culture and the culture(s) of their ethnicity, altering their behaviour to align with the mainstream culture on campus.

> "*In college I am more Irish, I feel that. It's hard to explain, outside of here I am more [nationality named]"* (Asian).
>
> *"…you can't really act the way you act around your culture, the way you would with a different culture*" (Nigerian).

BME students' patterns of socialisation on campus indicate little integration but instead confirm congregation around "*islands of comfortable consensus*" with the onus on those from ethnic minorities to adapt their behaviours to be part of the group or be excluded from groups based

on their ethnic diversity (Haring-Smith, 2012, p.11).

> "*I say I live between two cultures on campus, Nigerian and Irish...*" (Nigerian).
>
> "*In college I am more Irish…outside of here I am more Indian*" (Indian).

The common room has developed as a substructure for ethnically diverse students to locate themselves in an environment where they feel comfortable and can be their authentic selves (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Carving out a space on campus, which has happened with the common room cannot be ignored concerning discussions of ethnicity and understandings of belonging and inclusion on campus. Counter-story telling from CRT provides a contrasting perspective; the common room is an important site of social interaction and belonging, providing a rich experience of local belonging and attachment for some students on campus. This inclusiveness and sense of belonging depends on who is using this space, who is observing the use of this space, and their interpretation of this space. The common room has become an ethnic enclave for young Black-African students on campus in particular:

> "*Different minorities mostly go there. They have their own different cultures. So let's say if you are an Irish person to go in there, there are a lot of African people, some Asian people...The Irish wouldn't really go there because it's been taken over by the Africans and the Asian population*" (Nigerian).

A standout finding from the fieldwork is The Oreo biscuit metaphor discussed by one of the participants that reflected integration for them and acceptance into to the dominant culture:

> "*My friends call me an Oreo [biscuit], I'm Black on the outside but White on the inside. It's me, it's my personality I choose to be this way. If I was to speak to my family members back home I would feel disconnected...It's not that bad to be different. I'd rather be different than the same to everyone else, my own uniqueness that makes me stand out*" (Nigerian).

The participants' narratives suggest that the campus is diverse and inclusive, yet the fieldwork also reveals that they continually have to assimilate, adapt, integrate and thereby conform to the dominant culture as the daily norm. To parse the contrast, is it a case that the students that I interviewed, felt included because they had assimilated or adapted to the mainstream student population culture of whiteness. Challenging the assumption that BME students will conform to the mainstream student population perspectives is imperative.

4.2 Unmasking Microaggressions.

Sensitised through a CRT lens for viewing I gain an understanding of the various ways that student participants in the study are oppressed when they experience microaggressions (dynamic diversity at the micro level), based on their ethnic and cultural identity. A CRT framework and a critical race consciousness deepens the understanding of BME students' unique and marginalised position on and off campus as revealed in their responses.

4.2.1 Mispronunciation of Name.

The mispronunciation of a name is one of the numerous steps by which a person's cultural heritage is devalued (Gómez, 2012). Of all the questions I asked the students this was the one that elicited the most responses, by double. Correcting someone who mispronounces our name makes us feel uncomfortable especially if there are power dynamics at play as in the case between a lecturer and a student. The participants whose names were mispronounced did correct the person, and their emotional responses range from being indifferent to annoyance, to accepting the mispronunciation as a normal occurrence. Rather than seeing the person mispronouncing the name at fault, students subscribed to the belief that this was expected, and that they would do the same in another context.

> "*Sometimes I correct them, it's ok, it's normal, it's something that I'm used to, I don't mind*" (Black African).
>
> "*Some people I know for a year, they still mispronounce it. Sometimes I correct them, depends on who it is*" (Asian).

While often unconscious and unintentionally upsetting, mispronunciation of name or comments on name can reach to a microaggression and take its toll when repeated. It can also have a cumulative effect on recipients. According to Kohli and Solórzano (2012), it is a sign of a microaggression when a teacher mispronounces, disregards, or changes a child's name.

> "*I didn't really like people using my full name because they butchered it too much…*" (Nigerian).

Historically our names have functioned as a mark and verification of our identity. Our names define us and can open up a treasure trove in their significance, attributes and individuality. Our names provide us with roots, origins and meaning (Gómez, 2012). It is a matter of simple civility to try to pronounce names correctly. It shows you are paying attention to them in that moment.

The modification of name appeared in the responses. At Goldsmiths College, University of London "*34% of BME students have attempted to modify their ethnic or cultural identity…in order to 'fit in' more closely into prevailing Western norms*" (Akel, 2019, p. 8). Modifications include changing their name and adjusting their accent. The correct pronunciation of name can be internalised as an imposition on others for them to learn the name correctly, and so the name was changed to make it easier for others to pronounce.

> "*I don't mind being called [name]…I had one lecturer who was calling me [name] instead of [name]...I only changed it when I first came to [campus] because they struggle to say my name even the shortened down version, so it's easier to call me [name]*" (Nigerian).
>
> "*I get sick of it so I changed my name to my other name my parents gave me which was [name] and I changed my Facebook name and people did not know who I was…so I stick with [name]*" (Nigerian).

Additionally, it can be an embarrassment to have to continue correcting the mispronunciation.

> *"…so after a few times I just give up, you can call me whatever you want, 'X,' 'Y' but the correct one is 'Z.' Most of the staff they pronounce my name correctly*" (South East Asian).
>
> "*I just changed my name*" (African).
>
> "*I told him to call me [name] and I don't mind that…surname, not an issue*" (Nigerian Irish).

Our names are very personal and carry a great deal of meaning for us. It is very necessary that staff in higher education learn to pronounce the names of our students even if that takes a number of attempts to get it right and if it places us outside our comfort zone.

4.2.2 Microaggressions based on Ethnicity.

The findings revealed personal narratives that were rich with examples and incidents of microaggressions based on ethnicity. The research participants were shown a selection of photos and were asked if they had any personal experience of what they saw in the images. With a race consciousness focus I was specifically looking for patterns and commonalities in how the microaggressions were experienced based on the ethnic identity groupings of the student research participants as self-ascribed.

Asking someone where they are really from is considered a microinsult. Seven responses from

students of African origin revealed that they get asked this question frequently and can understand this based on their skin colour. Differentiating between intent and impact is important with this microinsult as it is layered and nuanced. Non-Black people are attributed to asking this question, whereas Black people will ask where are your parents from, thereby acknowledging that the parents were born elsewhere but that the participant was born/resides in Ireland. The intention here is to figure out heritage by asking where the parents are from and the impact is not to insult when Blacks ask Blacks this question. However, non-Blacks asking where are you really from is attributed to being a microinsult along with the manner of how the question is asked:

> "*I get that a lot. Sometimes I just say that I am Irish*" (Nigerian Irish).
>
> "*Blacks acknowledge the difference of being born here, but parents from Nigeria*' (Irish-Nigerian parents).
>
> "*I would agree with that, mostly non Blacks [will ask] where are you really from. Blacks will say where are your parents from*" (Irish-Nigerian parents).

The microaggression '*Why do you sound so White?*", represents a microinvalidation, indicated by excluding, negating or nullifying a person based on their ethnicity. The concept of liminality is useful for understanding inclusion and exclusion that some participants experience on campus. Liminality in this context refers to "*in between-ness*", "*neither here nor there*", a time and feeling of transitioning for some participants (Turner, 1967, p. 95). This feeling of transitioning is evident from the student participants from all ethnicities:

> "*Somebody on the bus told me you sound proper Irish. The Black people in my class tell me you don't even sound Irish at all. Which one is it....,*" (Nigerian).

It can be difficult to identify a microaggression when other explanations seem perfectly acceptable and reasonable in the context. At times it may even appear as what Thomas refers to as "*macrononsense*" and thereby minimise the harmful impact of microaggressions (Thomas, 2008, p. 274).

A microaggression that represents a microassault, is revealed through a verbal or non-verbal attack that is not meant to be hurtful, like asking to touch someone's hair. It was the discussion of this microassault that reverberated with eleven of the participants of African origin. Instances of this occurring were quick to come to mind with vivid descriptions accompanying their reactions. An invasion of personal space appears to be violated and causes the participant to

experience discomfort and feel threatened:

> "*I said, do you mind…I would not go up and touch your hair, so please be respectful*" (Nigerian Irish).
>
> "*I have an irritation of people touching my hair…it does annoy me…and people stare at you*" (Irish-Nigerian parents).
>
> "*To be honest you get so used to it, it's been happening for so long that you are just numb to it now*" (Nigerian).

More un-provoking responses have been not to care, allow others touch their hair, and attribute it to curiosity and not get offended:

> "*When they ask to touch it, I just go yeah sure, go on*" (Nigerian).
>
> "*It's curiosity I don't find it too offensive*" (Nigerian).

BME students in this study were microaggressed hourly, daily, weekly and monthly. Whether intentional or unintentional, prolonged, and repeated exposure to microaggressions belittles participants based on their ethnicity. This was particularly the case for the Black students whose experiences of microaggressions were more pronounced and direct because of their ethnicity.

4.3 Inclusive Learning Environments.

One of the key opportunities for integration on campus is inside the classroom. The concept of belonging inside the classroom is guided by the theoretical nuances of CRT principles on the social construction of race and challenging the predominant White scholarship that currently exists in the academy globally. BME students' perceptions of an inclusive classroom and ethnicity-proofing curricula are addressed in this section.

4.3.1 Inside the Classroom.

There were mixed responses from the participants ranging from the lecturer trying to do their best, to a feeling of being singled out or marginalised based on ethnicity.

> "*I think they are doing the best they can to make us feel included*" (Nigerian Irish).
>
> "*I don't like it when they say join with this person, I prefer to join groups by myself but don't pinpoint me, 'Oh I'm the Black girl join with the Black girl'*" (African).
>
> "*Sometimes the lecturer would give a little bit more detailed answers to Irish students*

> *who asked the same question. That happened a couple of times and it's upsetting. I remember, one of my classes [name] asked the teacher a question and the teacher said 'I can't help you, it's your [assessment],' and a White girl went up to her and she explained it to her straight away and [name] was so upset. We were all upset*" (Nigerian Irish).

When singled out in the classroom based on their ethnicity, for some BME students in this study it manifests in being interrupted or overlooked when contributing in class to an academic discussion, and that their contributions were under more scrutiny by White peers. When students lack the awareness of racial inequalities embedded within the campus climate and curriculum and pedagogical approach, this can be symptomatic of the prevalent majoritarian view of whiteness as a concept in higher education.

A brave space pedagogical approach (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Pawlowski, 2019) offers an alternative to conventional safe spaces to explore racial identities and antiracist pedagogy. Safe spaces allow a retreat from an uncomfortable challenge whereas brave spaces welcome the risk, tension and conflict that learning about racialisation brings so we can expand our reasoning and ultimately our learning and transformation on the matter.

4.3.2 Ethnicity-proofing Higher Education Curricula.

Racialisation is also in evidence in the academy in what we teach and how we teach in ways that are predominantly Eurocentric. Student participants were asked if the content of the modules that lecturers delivered is diverse and inclusive:

> "*You can't expect it to really change that much because it is this region of the world. So, you can't expect them to be learning about the Asian stock exchange or something*" (Nigerian).

> "*Actually, now you bring that up, most of our subjects…I don't think it has a lot of ethnicity except [name of module*]" (Nigerian).

> "*Oh yeah it's mostly Ireland, there's no different examples from different countries, mostly it's on European or American [content] and you won't find anything else from other countries*" (Black African).

> "*No not really, I feel like in this country they like to use what they have. If Nigeria had their own knowledge they would use that also…*' (Nigerian Irish).

These findings show limited contributions from other cultures or multiple theoretical underpinnings. Coupled with that was the finding that the students interviewed did not expect it to be any other way, due to geographical location or discipline of study. Eurocentric curricula often overlook the contributions to knowledge from ethnic minorities. The inclusion of multicultural content in the curriculum appears to be taking place in an uncoordinated and irregular way. Unmasking and critically reconstructing the curriculum and pedagogy needs to become a visible event to ensure we build and sustain a campus-wide inclusive curriculum as a strategic priority. Decolonising and diversifying the curriculum as a driver of change renews the content being taught in higher education classrooms. The students we teach come from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds. This has implications for a pedagogical approach that reflects that diversity and inclusion in the content of courses. A deviation from learning that bolsters Eurocentric scholarship that is predominantly White above other perspectives is required. There is a need for a critical mass of faculty, committed to diversity to transform courses to reflect diverse content.

5. Conclusions.

By exploring who is racialised and who is not among the student population on campus has been complex and nuanced. This has implications for our emerging University Educational Model regarding learning experiences, pedagogy, and for relationships and engagements within campus environments that are all underpinned by inclusion and belonging in higher education. An understanding of context is fundamental. Dynamic diversity combines contextual factors and compositional diversity. A race consciousness in this study is used to frame the findings of the research and acts as a counter-narrative to the dominant student population and culture on campus. The theoretical nuances of CRT have excavated deeper underlying assumptions regarding higher education as a racialised form of knowledge and questions White privilege in the academy. When BME students adapt to or assimilate the behaviours and practices of the dominant group then the dominant White privilege remains the way of seeing the world.

The conclusions of this research demonstrate a lack of recognition of the ethnic and cultural differences that students bring to our classrooms; the need to be inclusive in our teaching and learning; to increase our understanding of the points of pain and frustration that our BME students experience daily or weekly on campus, and to strengthen the academy to become ethnically literate educators. Belonging and a social connection with BME's own ethnic culture

and belonging to the dominant culture are both needed for BME students' sense of belonging to their campus. Suggestions for inclusive practice are getting to know our students' names and identity in a culturally respectful way, using a framework (such as Building MultiStories a framework) that supports staff and students in higher education to diversify the curriculum that develops critical awareness of the need and benefit of diverse knowledge sources, promoting conditions that support the development of a growth mind-set through race dialogue in our learning environments (Brookfield, 2019) and meaningful inclusivity for BME students in social experiences, on campus. An inclusive campus is part of a connected campus that centralises all voices. Fragmented pockets of good practice are not enough. It requires an organisation wide approach that is strategic and systemic. The governance of a campus where we all belong and are included is everyone's responsibility.

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