Shop talk: talking shop about creating safe spaces in the HBCU classroom

Discutere di lavoro: conversazioni professionali sulla creazione di spazi sicuri in classi HBCU

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Abstract

The perception of historically Black colleges and universities (commonly known as HBCUs) in the United States is that they are culturally familiar havens for students of color from underrepresented groups who are seeking shelter from ideological and racially biased predominately White institutions or PWIs. The fact of the matter is that there are components of the culture at HBCUs and other similarly situated universities that speak to the need for the creation of "safe spaces" in order to ensure that all students who attend are protected and made to feel welcomed. Using muted group theory along critical discourse theory as a backdrop, this study was conducted among a small sample of educators who participated in a faculty institute workshop and book talk (N = 14) at an HBCU in Maryland about their classroom practices and ways in which each member created a safe space in their own teaching processes. The findings of this study include faculty respondents who largely reported that they do make some accommodations to assist students in their efforts to feel comfortable within their own classrooms. These actions they stated were necessary in today's political climate and to ensure inclusiveness for all.

Keywords: HBCUs, inclusiveness; micro-aggression; Muted Group Theory; safe spaces.

Abstract

La percezione negli Stati Uniti degli Historically Black Colleges and Universities (comunemente noti come HBCU) è che siano paradisi culturalmente familiari per studenti di colore provenienti da gruppi sottorappresentati, che cercano riparo da istituzioni con pregiudizi ideologici e razziali, istituzioni prevalentement Bianche o PWI. La realtà è che ci sono componenti culturali presso le HBCU e altre università similmente collocate che parlano della necessità di creare "spazi sicuri" al fine di garantire a tutti gli studenti che frequentano di essere protetti e fatti sentire accolti. Utilizzando la muted group theory insieme alla teoria del discorso critico come sfondo, questo studio è stato condotto su un piccolo campione di educatori che ha partecipato a un workshop in un istituto universitario e ad un book talk (N = 14) presso una HBCU nel Maryland riguardante le pratiche didattiche e i modi in cui ogni membro ha creato uno spazio sicuro nei propri processi di insegnamento. I risultati di questo studio includono interviste tra i docenti i quali hanno ampiamente riferito di prendere alcune misure per assistere gli studenti nei loro sforzi di sentirsi a proprio agio all'interno delle aule. Queste azioni sono state presentate come necessarie nel clima politico odierno e per garantire a tutti l'inclusione.

Parole chiave: HBCU; inclusione; micro-aggressione; Muted Group Theory; spazi sicuri.

1. Introduction

In today's politically charged environment the college and university classroom, an historical training ground for political and ideological development can become ever contentious. Today's students must navigate an increasingly dynamic and fraught geo-political landscape, while understanding and asserting their own identities within this landscape. It has been largely assumed that classrooms in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are welcoming and all-embracing. The number of students attending HBCUs who are not African American or Black or of an African ethnic background has continued to increase each year since the 1980s (Anderson, 2017; Butrimowicz, 2014; Paddock, 2013; Smith-Barrow, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 1991). There are several institutions that are historically Black, and now boast of enrollments that are now majority White or other racial background (Smith-Barrow, 2015). Also, faculty members, many whom also come from diverse backgrounds, are discovering that they must also navigate a complex field of interests, ideologies and concerns of students who are all seeking to feel "welcomed" in the classroom in today's college and university setting.

The idea of creating a safe space and making students feel welcomed today is heighted by the string of politicized terms that seek to dismantle the centuries old norms of White supremacy and marginalization of "others" who are not members of the "in-group", White Anglo-Saxon males from privileged backgrounds (The Roestone Collective, 2014; Harris, Jones Medine & Rhee, 2016). As such, a cluster of terms have emerged to address the phenomena of insertion of out groups and comfort making practices of groups of color to ensure that they not only receive an equal education, but that they are also welcomed in the process. Those terms include; micro-aggression, safe space, trigger warnings, trauma, inclusiveness, diversity and identity politics (Amenbar, 2016; Heller, 2016; Sadowski, 2016; Svrluga, 2016).

Similarly, many students at HBCUs face challenges related to sexual identity, political affiliation or socioeconomic class. For instance, at Bowie State University, which is located in the state of Maryland in the Mid Atlantic region of the United States, many students are considered upper middle class, hailing from Prince George's County Maryland, one of the highest per capita income and majority African-American counties in the nation (Data USA, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). There are also students who come from other less-affluent backgrounds from other areas in the region such as the City of Baltimore and underserved neighborhoods in Washington, DC. This cross section of predominately African-American students meet in the classroom and other university-related settings, and bring a variety of political views, experiences and find themselves seated in the same classrooms actively engaging in rigorous debate. It is now, as it has always been the responsibility and duty of the college and university faculty to referee and create a safe and welcoming space within their college classrooms (Bain, 2004; Booker, 2016; Tomoka, 2009). The premise of this work is to assert that while diversity, inclusion and awareness and respect of others who are different from oneself is a presumed necessity at PWIs, and other "diversified" institutions, it is also necessary in places such as HBCUs, where monolithic assumptions about student experiences, identity and beliefs cannot be assured.

2. Background

This work is a result of a faculty institute workshop conducted at Bowie State University in Bowie, MD, a small university (HBCU) with approximately 6,000 undergraduate and

graduate students, located 45 miles east of the U.S. Capital, Washington, DC. The faculty members, at the time taught and continue to teach in the Department of Communications and were asked to provide a "book talk" on a publication titled "Shop Talk: Lessons in Teaching from an African-American Hair Salon" (Majors, 2015).

Using the metaphor of the Black beauty salon as the microcosm for creation of a safe space for teaching and learning, the work is a description of the experiences of the author, Majors, who uses the example of an African-American beauty salon called Kuttin' Up, which is located just north of the Magnificent Mile in Chicago (Illinois) to illustrate the concept of "safe" and "protected" spaces from the dominant group (Whites) within a beauty salon, which serves Black clientele exclusively. The theme of the book is structured around the notion that the "salon" is a "safe space", where African-American or Black women can go and be themselves and be "free" from the pressures of society and what others may think of them. Coincidental to these notions is that there is a specific dialogue and process that accompanies these "rituals" and "practices". Majors (2015) states that these practices can be replicated within the HBCU classroom and elsewhere when the need to foster a safe space or increased "inclusiveness" arises.

In the study an ethnography of clients and beauticians or stylists in a Black beauty salon, Majors details the practices within a social setting and how the construct of "literacy" is evoked as a person's ability to "read" a social situation and contribute to the verbal "text" after the process of learning the key practices and skills of the discourse. Such skills she writes "are cultivated in particular social, cultural, and linguistic contexts, within and across spaces and time, classrooms being one space of many" (Majors, 2015, p. 1). She continues, defining the concept of shop talk as "talk as performative discourse, where clients, beauticians, and other community members act out skillful, culturally scripted roles for their and others' benefit." (ivi, p. 3). The book and the subsequent study details the manner in which the participants engage in the process of social literacy, which are often replicated in film like the *Barbershop* Franchise, which includes the spin-off *Beauty Shop* (Chang, 2016; Rotten Tomatoes, 2018) and similarly themed movies such as *Good Hair* and illustrate the conversational style and forum suggested for classrooms.

3. Research Problem

Despite the predominate view that HBCUs are safe havens for diversity of thought and lived experiences, the notions that such institutions and classrooms are automatically considered "safe spaces" must be reconsidered and approached in more deliberate terms using culturally appropriate discourse and educational pedagogy. One possible method of consideration is the concept of shop talk and the creation of safe spaces as outlined in the work of Majors (2015), which determines that like a beauty salon or barber shop in the African-American community, an HBCU classroom can adopt similar practices that allow for cultural safety and sense of belonging and refuge from the oppressive practices of American society at large. These practices can be considered and adopted as an educational pedagogy through the use of culturally specific language, dialogue and interactions for faculty looking to increase a sense of belonging for their students. This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. how valuable does faculty believe the use of the concept or practice of "shop talk" to be for the HBCU classroom?

2. how important are "culturally responsive" teaching tools such as books, presentations, film and other "relatable" materials to faculty members at HBCUs?
3. in what other ways do faculty at HBCUs establish a safe space in their classrooms?

3.1. Theoretical Overview

While Majors (2015) employs the use of critical discourse theory to frame the ethnographic study of Kuttin' Up Salon, this study also employs the use of muted group theory (Swann, Deumert, Lillis & Mesthrie, 2004). The author believes that both theoretical frames are apt for this study, as critical discourse theory outlines the ways and manner in which members of "out groups" can use discourse to reframe hegemonic narratives and to assert themselves into the larger discussion by framing such discussion on the notion that they have a right and a duty to be heard and included. This notion also speaks to the concept and construct of muted group and the impact and legacy of belonging to a group whose voice and societal needs and concerns are ignored and largely unmet and how those frames are subconsciously adopted by members of marginalized groups who then replicate dominant culture narratives within their own social circles and environments. Both theories describe the sociopolitical arena of African Americans, who have continually fought for a "seat at the table" since their arrival in the 1600s and still find themselves in a continual battle for recognition and inclusion even today (Morial, 2017). By framing the study using both theoretical components, there is a pathway of liberation from oppressive and tyrannical systems of the "dominant culture" by the assertion of one's own cultural language and ways of understanding both within the group and as a tool of interaction among others. There is also an understanding of one's own position in society and how that position or standing came to exist as well as a pathway to full inclusion and participation in society.

3.2. Related Literature

In addition to the work of Majors (2015), there are other scholars who have focused their attention on the creation of safes spaces in the college classroom.

Additionally, other researchers have outlined the new collegiate environment, which displays a striking resemblance of the politically charged American campuses during the 1960s, yet today's students are likely to be engaged in issues deemed more of a personal nature than those of a collective, although the individual battles are, once victorious, beneficial to all students. These dynamics are outlined in the work of The Roestone Collective (2014), which offers an operation definition of the term "safe space" as first originating in the LGBTIA movement and its logo, denoted by a pink triangle to assure members of this community of safety. The work continues by noting that the term has evolved and now includes other communities and its primary operative as with the original group of protectants is "keeping marginalized groups free from violence and harassment", while also encouraging a 'certain' license to speak and act freely form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance" (ivi, p. 1346). This process, they state, allows students the ability to "unravel, build and rebuild knowledge."

Similarly, Tomoka (2009) addresses the importance of instructor involvement in creating safety in the face of presumptive practices that would suggest or imply a safe space, particularly in a women's studies or similar classroom environment. She notes that the varying intersections of race, gender and sexuality can impede the process of "safety" and can sometimes only be navigated with the proper and astute facilitation of faculty members. Holley and Steiner (2005) note that a group of social work students when polled revealed

that they had indeed learned more and found their classroom instruction far more valuable when they were exposed to safe space environments. On the other hand, Suad Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) discuss the stories of Muslim students and their challenging experiences brought on by a lack of understanding of their circumstances by members of the university community and the subsequent pain each student felt by that misunderstanding. The authors suggest that by embracing the concepts unity of diversity a larger safe space is created and established by each scholar's right to exist. They call for "identity safe" spaces for students who identify as Muslim in today's tenuous environment, thereby requiring education and examination of instructor beliefs and personal bias.

In a study of undergraduate African-American women who were students at a PWI, Booker (2016) found that while peer relationships were important, it was faculty involvement and the relating of a set of key characteristics among faculty, such as fostering a cohesive and inclusive classroom community along with helping all students feel welcomed by encouraging mutual respect, "authentic instruction" and a sense of belonging that played a key role in student success. When those characteristics were present, students reported higher levels of satisfaction at their schools and were able to graduate in the prescribed time between 4 and 6 years, they felt like they were welcomed outside of opportunities to discuss race-related issues and they felt less isolated within their institutions. As a way to cope, the women shared that they often created "counter spaces" where they could find a welcoming, understanding and supportive community of their peers. Harrison (2016) details the importance of a campus radio station in creating a safe space for African-Americans who attended at PWI and also for the role such stations held in promoting hip hop music as a popular musical genre.

The issue of safe space and race is also addressed in the work of Harris et al. (2016) who write about the experiences of religious studies professors, who are also of color. The study found that the classroom can be a place where "power is accorded and exercised in our society", and that women of color who encounter this culture within the classroom can find that oppressive norms are reflected in educational settings as well—even when they are the instructor, thereby challenging authoritative norms, and questioning instructor authenticity and legitimacy.

Similarly, the perspective of faculty members working to create safe spaces within the learning environment is explored in the work of Delano-Oriaran, Omobolade and Parks (2015) who discuss the notion of White privilege and how it is addressed in their courses. They note that "discomfort" among students who have been acculturated to view their privilege as part of a larger meritocracy requires safe spaces to ensure the process of "developing the tools of awareness, experience, knowledge and vocabulary" thereby allowing students to express their misunderstanding of the larger societal practices of discrimination. Citing the work of Holley and Steiner (2005), they write: "Safe spaces are classroom environments where students feel secure and empowered to engage in civil, honest, critical, and challenging dialogues about sensitive issues. In such classrooms, students feel secure to express their individuality or perspectives without reason for any backlash that could cause emotional, physical, or psychological harm."

Also, there are news articles that detail the phenomenon of creating safe spaces in the college classroom (Brown & Mangan, 2016; The Economist, 2015), and also discuss the notion of micro-aggressions playing out on campuses in the United States in recent years. Events at The University of Missouri, which led to the resignation of the university's president after racial instances on campus sparked outcry of insensitivity to students of color. In 2015 students at Yale protested an email by the university requesting a "subdued"

and "non-offensive" celebration that avoided costumes that would be deemed "offensive" to groups of color such as Native American headdresses, turbans and blackface make up. While these instances are being debated, the larger issues of belonging and welcome-ness are often considered "whining" by some members of the dominant culture and some universities such as the University of Chicago (Svrluga, 2016) have established anti-shield policies that upholds the notion of academic freedom and essentially tells students to "grow up" or learn to develop a thicker skin in the face of discomfort. Similar accounts are revealed in the work of Heller (2016), which outlines the challenges at Oberlin when the fault lines of racial diversity, student protests, social justice, economic class and university administration collide. Also, as previously stated, while HBCUs may be considered safe havens from discriminatory speech and practices, they too, are often in need of cultural sensitivity training and discussion of creating safe spaces in their environments for students and faculty.

4. Methodology

The study conducted to follow the presentation or book talk on the work of Majors (2015), which outlines the ways in which HBCU faculty can implement the concept of "shop talk" in their college classrooms to foster a sense of inclusion and to create a safe space. After hearing the presentation from three faculty members from the Department of Communications at Bowie State University, during the 2016 faculty institute, members of the audience who attended the workshop and book talk were invited to participate in the data collection and discussion component of the session. Once each member of the presenting team detailed each of the chapters in the text, audience members were given the opportunity to express their feelings about the concept of shop talk and also to discuss their own personal practices in the classroom in their respective departments.

In the hope of answering the stated research questions, a survey instrument containing 19 questions for respondents to share their experiences with the workshop was designed to gage participant responses to the idea of shop talk and to gather a sense of the strategies used within the classroom to ensure safe spaces were created during the hours of instruction.

4.1. Demographic Information

Survey participants were asked to indicate several demographic responses to the initial five questions on the instrument those questions were as follows:

1. Academic Rank: Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor: of the 13 respondents there were 4 faculty members who identified as lectures, 8 who identified as assistant professors, there were no associate professors or full professors and there was one respondent who did not answer this question;
2. Bowie State University College - Arts & Sciences, College of Business, College of Education, College of Professional Studies: for the second question, at total of six faculty members represented the College of Arts and Sciences, there were three faculty from the College of Education, also three from the college of Business and Professional Studies;
3. Specific Subject Taught: with regard to the subject taught by responding faculty, there were representatives from the following academic departments and programs at Bowie State University (Figure 1);

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Nursing-3
      Community Health Nursing/Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing
      Complex Care/Nursing
      Maternal and Infant Nursing
Communications-2
      Computer Science
Fine and Performing Arts-2
      Music, Applied Voice
      Theater and Visual Arts
Educational Leadership-2
      Psychology
      Social Work
Non-Answers-2
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Figure 1. Representatives from academic departments and programs at Bowie State University

4. Race/Ethnicity: Black/African-American, Asian, Latino/a, White/Caucasian, Other: nine of the responding faculty members self identified as African-American and three identified as White, with two respondents who opted not to answer demographic information on the form;

5. The age categories listed were 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 55+, and Rather Not Say: regarding the age category, there was one faculty member who reported as being in the 18-24 age group, four faculty who reported their age group as 35-44, one faculty member who reported their age as 45-54 and six in the 55+ category and two that did not wish to indicate their age for the survey.

4.2. Study Instrument

The survey was divided into three sections including the introductory and demographic questions 1-5. Questions 6 to 8 were posed using a 5-point Likert scale; with responses: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree and strongly agree. Questions 9 to 16 were also posed using a Likert scale with the following response options; most often, often, some, little, very little. To answer the prescribed research questions, the instrument displayed the following questions.

To address the first research question:

RQ1: How valuable does faculty believe the use of the concept or practice of "shop talk" to be for the HBCU classroom? The questions/statements in Figure 2 were posed.

6. I was very familiar with the concept of "Shoptalk before my participation in the workshop.

7. I believe that "Shoptalk" isan effective tool in the college classroom.

10. I apply "Shoptalk" and similar practices in my classroom.

Figure 2. Questions posed to address RQ1.

For the second research question:

RQ2: How important are "culturally responsive" teaching tools such as books, presentations, film and other "relatable" materials to faculty members at HBCUs? The statements/questions in Figure 3 were posed.

8. Culturally responsive teaching tools are very important in my classroom.

9. I allow the use of informal/profane/colloquial/AAE (African-American English) in my classroom.

11. During the semester, I use tools of inquiry such as metacognition and analysis in the classroom, (i.e., group conversations, journaling and classroom debates).

15. My predominate or main teaching subject is easily intermingled or associated with social justice themes common in society today.

Figure 3. Questions posed to address RQ2.

For the third and final research question;

RQ3: In what other ways do faculty at HBCUs establish a safe space in their classrooms? The questions in Figure 4 were addressed in the instrument.

10. I apply "Shoptalk" and similar practices in my classroom.

12. I consider my classroom a "safe space" in an attempt to allow for free and open dialogue regarding racialized or politically sensitive topics.

16. During classroom discussions about social justice issues or other social topics, I assist my students with alternative perspectives and recommend suggestions on how to increase their sense of social responsibility and obligation to contribute to solving key social problems of today.

Figure 4. Questions posed to address RQ3.

In order to allow for longer and more detailed responses, there were also questions at the end of the instrument that asked for open-ended responses to the following questions (Figure 5).

17. Briefly describe the ways you engage with students during class to assure them that they have entered a "safe space" and can freely and openly discuss issues/topics, which are of concern to them.

18. List any recommendations to other professors about ways to adopt a safe space experience or environment in their classroom.

19. What is your policy/practice regarding the use of informal/profane/colloquial/AAE (African-American English) in your classroom?

Figure 5. Questions posed to address RQ1.

Group Discussion and Safe Space Scenarios:

In addition to the instrument, workshop participants were asked to divide into groups of 3 to 4 individuals. Once the groups were determined, the presenters read a list of "safe space scenarios" and asked each group to select one of the options. The scenarios, which were presented for each group's choosing, were derived from actual classroom experiences of each of the presenters and adjusted slightly for brevity and ease of understanding for the participants. Given that there were only 4 groups and 6 scenarios the two that were not chosen are noted below and the others are detailed in the findings.

Safe Space Scenario #1: Your class is discussing the largely unpublicized campaign to stop police brutality against Black women. A student who identifies as a member of the transgender community argues that people care even less about transgender women. Once of the young men in your class begins to raise his voice, stating that trans women deserve their violent fates. How do you create a safe space for your transsexual student?

Safe Space Scenario #2: Your class has decided to talk about what the election of Donald Trump might mean for America. As the largely Democratic class begins to weigh in their opinions, a lone Black Republican argues that her voice is being drowned out. When she states she likes Trump (and plans to vote for him), her classmates jeer. How do you create a safe space for your single GOP voter?

5. Findings

In response to the stated research questions the study revealed the following:

RQ1: How valuable does faculty believe the use of the concept or practice of "shop talk" to be for the HBCU classroom?

When asked about the familiarity of the concept of "shop talk", a slight majority stated that they were familiar with the concept. A total of 6 stated that they had not heard of the term previously.

In response to Question (statement) #7, "I believe that "Shoptalk" is an effective tool in the college classroom", respondents indicated that they, in fact believe in the usefulness of employing the concept of shop talk within their classrooms. The overwhelming majority of those polled said they agreed that the tool is effective.

On the other hand, when asked in Question #10 to rate their responsiveness or level of agreement to the statement, "I apply "Shoptalk" and similar practices in my classroom," while faculty members surveyed stated overwhelmingly that they believe the concept of shop talk is an effective teaching tool, the majority of faculty stated that they use the concept in their own classes occasionally, or "some" was the most common answer.

RQ2: How important are "culturally responsive" teaching tools such as books, presentations, film and other "relatable" materials to faculty members at HBCUs?

Question #8	Strongly Disaree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Culturally responsive teaching tools are very important in my classroom.	N/A	1	N/A	3	10

Figure 6. Question #8. Culturally responsive teaching tools are very important in my classroom.

Continuing with the notion of priority for creating safe spaces and the use of culturally responsive teaching tools, the majority of respondents for question #8 as indicated in Figure 1 below sate that they strongly agree with the statement that "culturally responsive teaching tools are very important in my classroom" (Figure 6).

With regard to the applicability of faculty teaching subject and its relation to social justice themes respondent answers indicate that many faculty in fact do interrelate their course

subjects with societal themes of social justice in their classroom. There were three faculty members who indicate that they do not intermingle their subjects with social justice themes.

RQ3: In what other ways do faculty at HBCUs establish a safe space in their classrooms?

Regarding the applicability of practices discussed in the workshop and themes addressed within the instrument, outlines the responses of faculty who report that they use or apply shop talk practices within their classrooms in some cases (Figure 7).

Question #	Most Often	Often	Some	Little	Very Little
Q10. I apply "Shoptalk" and similar practices in my classroom.	1	2	10	1	N/A
Q12. I consider my classroom a "safe space" in an attempt to allow for free and open dialogue regarding racialized or politically sensitive topics.	8	4	2	N/A	N/A

Figure 7. Questions #10 and #12. I apply "Shoptalk" and safe spaces in the classroom.

Further, when asked, a majority (8) of faculty polled state that they do in fact consider their classrooms a "safe space" in an attempt to allow for free and open dialogue regarding racialized or politically sensitive topics. A total of 4 faculty stated that they believe this is so "often" in their course while (2) stated that they believe this in some cases. The majority of respondents answered the question in the affirmative stating that they engage in this practice "most often".

For Questions 17-19 in the survey, open-ended response questions were provided to allow faculty respondents the ability to elaborate on some of their classroom practices and to specifically provide tips for other faculty members based upon the suggestions provided from the written statements. A few notable and selected responses are as follows:

17. Briefly describe the ways you engage with students during class to assure them that they have entered a "safe space" and can freely and openly discuss issues/topics, which are of concern to them. A couple of the responses are sampled here:

"I set the rules in the beginning about not being rude about their responses. I continue to monitor this through the semester."

"I try very hard on the first day of classes to make sure students feel that they are in a place where their opinions matter. They aren't necessarily always going to be in the majority, but it is important that they speak up."

For question 18 respondents were given the opportunity to list any recommendations to other professors about ways to adopt a safe space experience or environment in their classroom. Some of the respondents answered accordingly:

"Allow free discussion, but you should manage it to ensure all opinions are respected and everyone can participate freely. The invisible hand in the discussion is the professor's hand."

"I discuss the class climate early and I continually facilitate a positive class climate throughout the semester."

Also, in the workshop and during the breakout sessions in which respondents answered the remaining scenarios numbers 3 to 6 and they answered accordingly:

Safe Space Scenario #3 was chosen by Group #1: "The film *The Birth of a Nation* debuts this fall (2016). It chronicles the Nat Turner rebellion. You have been planning to take your class to see the film. As the premier date draws near, a White student in your class refuses to go and opts out of the class trip. How do you create a safe space for that student to discuss why he does not want to accompany the class to view the film?" Repondents stated that they would create a safe space by creating a discussion with the instructor and the student and ask him or her privately about what concerns they may have about the movie or going to see it with a group of fellow students, or if there were financial concerns about paying for the movie and troubleshoot other areas and facilitate discussion to allow the students concerns to be addressed and to provide him or her a voice in the process.

For Safe Space Scenario #4, which was selected by Group #2: "Five football players are scrolling through provocative profile pictures of scantily clad young women on their cell phones. They pass their phones back and forth between each other, commenting on whether they would engage in various "lewd" acts with the women in the photographs. There are only two young women in your class, and the male students outnumber them. How do you create a safe space for the two young women students?" They answered stating that they would discuss the incident as a class and before beginning the discussion they would establish rule of engagement, such as no profanity, no disrespect, and that the professor would act as moderator of the discussion. Secondly, they would divide the class into two groups and each group containing at least one woman. Students would then discuss their perspective of the video from their own personal experiences as either male or female to facilitate both empathy and future understanding from each side of the discussion. Group members reported that they would engage in role reversal for this scenario and also ask how each of the males in the group would feel if they were looking at members of their own family in such a video.

Safe Space Scenario #5 was answered by Group #4: "One of your students is a person with a disability. One of her accommodations is that she is granted extra time to take a test. Some of the other students complain about the fact that she is still taking a test while theirs have been collected. How do you create a safe space for the student with a disability?" The group answered indicating that they would diffuse the situation with humor by giving voice to other students. The group also noted that they would ask the student(s) to discuss why they felt that the student taking the exam and receiving extra time was unfair. They stated that they would asks students about preparedness and whether or not they felt the class as a whole had enough time to take the exam. Other questions would be posed about the effectiveness of homework assignments and if they amply prepared students for exams. They would also discuss the ADA (American's with Disability Act), which requires accommodation for persons with disabilities in all educational institutions that receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education. If these efforts did not seem to be effective, the instructor stated that some students would be spoken with during an "off-line" setting.

Safe Space Scenario #6 was chosen by Group #3: "In the middle of a class discussion about police brutality against African Americans, a student of Nigerian descent proclaims that Blacks born in America do not have it nearly as difficult as Blacks born elsewhere throughout the African diaspora. He adds that African Americans cannot even tie

themselves to the collective African struggle, since they do not know from which African nation they originally come. The class erupts in furor. How do you create a safe space where both African students and African-American students in the class can hear each other?" Faculty respondents in Group #3 stated that they would establish boundaries for discussion as it related to police brutality noting that it is an issue for people of color globally and that no marginalized group enjoys a particular benefit over another. Secondly, in order to discuss or treat the issue further, the group stated that they would ask the students to journal about the topic and engage in further discussion once that process was concluded. They also decided that as faculty they may also assign research papers on the topic and engage in peer review and grading of those papers so that students would gain deeper insight into the thoughts and ideas of their fellow students. Other ideas from the group include engaging in a class debate on the topic using a point/counter point format and also speaking with the student from Nigeria off line to discuss his or her feelings about their experiences in the class and to determine their motive for making such a controversial statement.

5. Discussion

As noted previously, it is false and misleading to presume that the HBCU classroom is an automatic safe space given its near racial homogenization. The need to purposefully create a safe space in this environment is equally paramount as it is in other "diversified" institutions. It can be concluded that the majority of respondents for this study believe in the practice of using their own classrooms as a safe space. While many faculty say the accommodate colloquial or informal language usage in their classrooms, not all do, and this suggests a need for increased cultural training and sensitivity given the racial composition of the university and the faculty who were surveyed for this study. Also, given the number of students who have expressed concern for their ability to feel comfortable and safe, the need exists for continued training and understanding of pedagogical practices that can be applied in varied classrooms under a variety of circumstances. In answer to the stated research questions, the study revealed the following conclusions:

RQ1: How valuable does faculty believe the use of the concept or practice of "shop talk" to be for the HBCU classroom?

Largely from the responses of the workshop participants and based upon the answers provided in the open ended and "safe space scenario" questions, the value of using shop talk was recognized and several faculty reported that they currently employed some of the same principles in their own classrooms prior to their attendance at the workshop. Among the respondents, the majority agreed that the use of the principles is an effective tool for higher education classrooms and they demonstrated their commitment to the practice in their responses. This is amplified in the work of Holley and Steiner (2005) and Booker (2016), which advocate for the creation of safe spaces given the importance of feeling comfortable for students.

RQ2: How important are "culturally responsive" teaching tools such as books, presentations, film and other "relatable" materials to faculty members at HBCUs?

As highlighted in the work of Suad Nasir and Al-Amin (2006), as well as Harris et al. (2016), cultural relatedness and openness are also important consideration for both students and faculty and with regard to culturally responsive teaching tools, respondents also related that they believed such tools were in fact effective. Many said they allowed for the use of

informal language in their classes, with some stating that they had no problem with such language as long as it was not offensive or that it did not interfere with the progress of the class. For instance in the safe space scenario where faculty were asked to evaluate a situation where one student did not wish to attend a class trip to view the movie *The Birth of Nation*, there was not objection to taking a group of students to see the film or for presenting a racially themed film as a class assignment. It is also a highly valued practice among the faculty surveyed to discuss political issues such as police brutality and citizen engagement with their students in class.

RQ3: In what other ways do faculty at HBCUs establish a safe space in their classrooms?

In the responses related to RQ3, respondents also noted that they consider their classrooms safe spaces and that they regularly encourage their students to speak freely about events that impact them outside of the classroom and that are of a political nature. They also state in answer to question 16, that they assist students in determining a possible solution to social problems when notions of those issues arise for discussion within the classroom. Most faculty responded that they provide their students with the opportunity to air grievances during class time and to air their frustrations about events happening in society. It is known for most faculty members, particularly those who teach in subjects that allow for more free-flowing and open discussions that students will disagree with one another. By allowing students to speak openly about their opinions, yet maintaining authority as the instructor to referee the discussions and reign them in when they become contentious was seen as key to ensuring that faculty created meaningful and actual "safe spaces". These practices were discussed extensively by Booker (2016) along with others (Bain, 2004; Tomoka, 2009) who advocate for creating safe spaces and who examined the process of student "sense-making" and their efforts to support one another in classes. While Booker's students were operating in PWIs these same practices can be encouraged for students in HBCUs or other institutions that predominately serve groups of color.

As noted in previous sections, the idea of creating a safe space is of noble intention. Yet, instructors find they must grapple with a number of issues that not only create a sense of comfortability for their students, but also removes the threat of bullying and intolerance of other students and their views. Such emphasis on creation of a safe space in the classroom and evokes the notion of muted group theory given those who are "silenced" in classroom are prevented from expressing their true thoughts and feelings in the fear of peer group backlash. The main premise of this study was to determine how professors at HBCUs engage in this process of classroom management and through creation of a safe space to ensure all students have a sense of being welcomed in the classroom, no matter their walk of life or political viewpoints.

6. Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is the sample size (N = 14). A larger sample of a more varied group of faculty from each major across the university may have garnered more detailed and major specific responses. Additionally, although this university is an HBCU, the respondent answers are not necessarily reflective of faculty members across all HBCUs (over 100 today), nor do student experiences detailed in this study exemplify or speak to the various unique student concerns on other HBCUs or PWI and other types of colleges and universities.

7. Implications for Future Research

As such, the need for increased research on safe spaces is absolutely a worthwhile topic for continued scholarship. The notion of education as liberation rather than indoctrination specifically notes the edict of inclusiveness and the end of hegemony. Students who are in the process of self exploration and maturation can and should be made to feel safe while at the same time the notion of academic freedom and freedom of speech can be valued. A pathway that is mutually acceptable to all who enter the academy as either a student or faculty can and should be explored in greater detail. It may also be of value to study the implications of the replication of dominant culture norms at HBCUs that prevent the creation of a safe space that fully reflects the cultural value of students, rather than those of faculty members, particularly when those faculty members are from different racial backgrounds than their students.

Acknowledgement

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