

# Through Black Eyes and Black Minds: Experiences of Black/African American Journalism Students' at Predominantly White Institutional Journalism Programs

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## 1.) Context

Undergraduate journalism students first exposure to a news media environment are the journalism classroom and student newsroom. Though it is a more controlled environment compared to a professional newsroom, Black/African American journalism students learn about newsroom culture, which includes (re)discovering racial power dynamics (Alexander, 2011). The journalism classroom— both formal and informal— is not immune to sociohistorical context, especially in a predominantly White institutional journalism program. Whiteness is embedded within journalism practices taught in these environments such as objectivity, gathering sources, and media writing. Media audiences across the United States are not seeing themselves in the news and notice the lack of representation (Alemán, 2014; Smith, 2008). Journalism pedagogy deserves some scrutiny because it is based on a Eurocentric ideology (Alemán, 2014). This dissertation will use Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a lens to understand and “transform the relationships among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 171) in predominantly White journalism schools by using the five tenets of CRT: 1.) whiteness as property, 2.) interest convergence, 3.) counterstorytelling, 4.) permanence of racism, and 5.) critique of liberalism/neoliberalism.

## 2.) Research Questions

**RQ1:** Based on Black/African American journalism students' racial experiences in the journalism classroom and student newsroom, how is Whiteness reproduce in journalism?

**RQ2:** How do Black/African American journalism students' experience racism in a student newsroom culture at a PWI journalism school?

**RQ3:** How do Black/African American journalism students' make-meaning of their experiences at a PWI journalism school?

## 3.) Objectives

- Explore students' experiences with covert and overt racism in the PWI student newsrooms, classrooms, and how they make-meaning of these experiences.
- Uncover Whiteness in these areas and how it effects Black/African American journalism students' educational experiences.
- Discover ways to better the educational experiences of Black/African American journalism students' at PWIs.
- Construct meanings of how visible and invisible racial systems and structures may target Black/African American journalism students'.
- Expand knowledge of Black/African American journalism students' experiences and perspectives while attending a PWI journalism program. In addition, expand knowledge of Black/African American journalism students' experiences in higher education.



Figure 1.

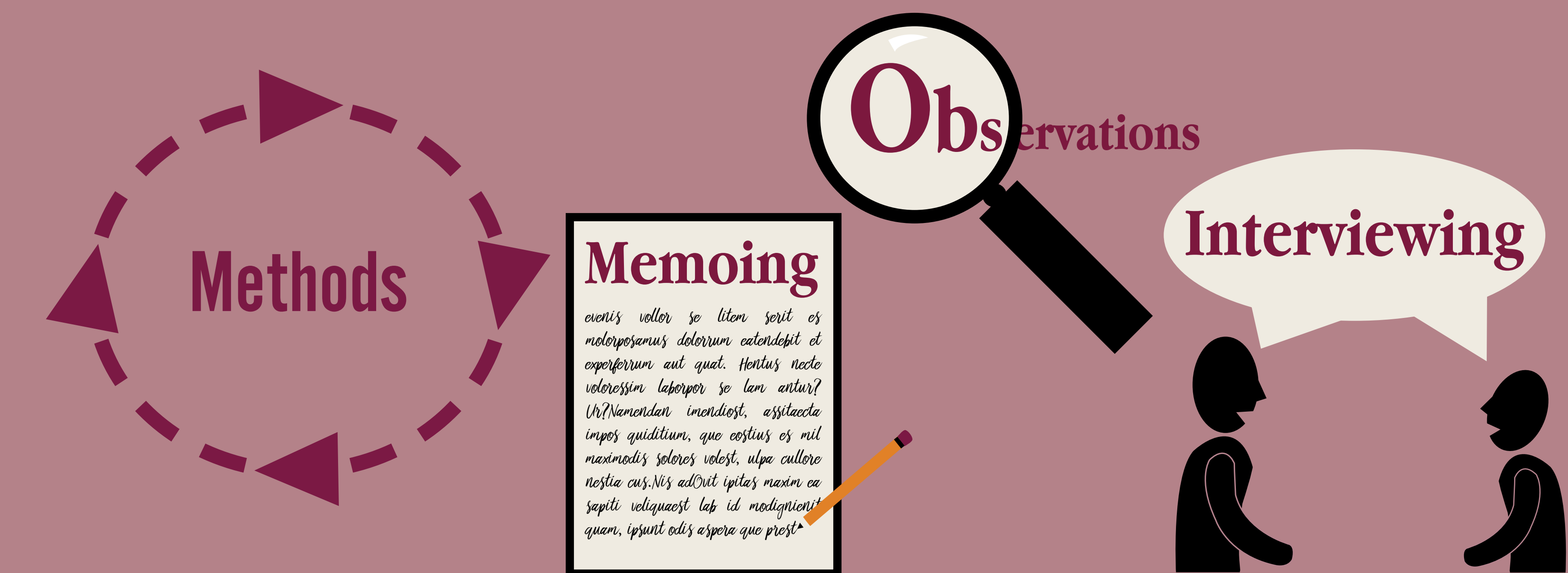
## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore Black/African American undergraduate journalism students' experiences at predominantly White institutional (PWI) journalism programs. This study will use Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the framework to understand the racial experiences these students face in formal (i.e., journalism classrooms) and informal (i.e., student media) educational settings. The researcher will use phenomenology for the methodology. Thus, this study will explore and understand the essence— the how and what— of these students experiences in PWI journalism programs and how this informs their construction of reality. The researcher will conduct qualitative interviews, observations, and reflective memoing. Furthermore, this study will explore how the dominant (not superior) White race may affect students' experiences, how they experience covert and overt racism in the student newsroom and journalism classroom, and explore issues of Whiteness in these environments. In addition, explore how objectivity, a skill considered important for all journalists to practice, is embedded in Whiteness.

## 4.) Methodology

Phenomenology can help a researcher explore peoples lived experiences and how they make-meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2016). Lived experiences are forms of counterstorytelling, which goes against the dominant ideologies and master-narratives within journalism scholarship. This domination disregards racially marginalized groups voices and helps maintain the privileged status of dominant groups (DiAquoi, 2018). Thus, Black/African American students (as well as all racially marginalized groups) are not heard. Additionality in journalism scholarship, their voices are lumped together with no consideration to define different racial experiences. This study will use:

- In-depth, semi-structure interviews with 10-25 Black/African American undergraduate journalism students enrolled in PWI journalism programs (via purposive and snowball sampling)
- A 57 question interview guide (21 main questions and 36 follow-up questions)
- Unobtrusive observations to assess behaviors and emotional responses



## 5.) Preliminary Results

One Black/African American undergraduate student who attended a southeastern PWI in the United States discussed their experiences at an internship and in the broadcast classroom. Many issues discussed revolved around the physical image of a broadcaster. During a broadcasting internship, the student asked their mentor about Black natural hair acceptance in the industry. According to the student, the mentor stated the student's hair was “too young, too wild, too like fun, basically to be on camera, it's distracting.” In addition, the student stated their journalism professor told students their hair should be straight and in a “bob.” The participant referred to the idea of natural hair not being accepted in the broadcast journalism because of Eurocentric standards of beauty. This could be related to Whiteness as property.

## 6.) Analysis

The researcher will conduct a thematic analysis through complex reasoning, which is three-step analysis. It is a top down approach by reviewing the text as a whole, engaging in selected passages, and analyzing line-by-line (Creswell, 2016). Then incorporate “deductive-inductive logic process” (Creswell, 2016, p. 43), which means themes form from the “bottom up,” but use an inductive process by comparing different themes (i.e., five tenets of CRT) and building new ones from the data.

