

# *Responding to Racism and Racial Trauma in Doctoral Study: An Inventory for Coping and Mediating Relationships*

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*In this study, Kimberly A. Truong and Samuel D. Museus focus on understanding strategies doctoral students of color use to respond to racism. The authors conducted semi-structured individual interviews with twenty-six participants who self-reported experiencing racism and racial trauma during doctoral studies. Analysis of the data resulted in findings that encompass three categories: internal responses, controlled responses, and external responses. These three broad themes comprise an inventory for responding to racism and racial trauma that focuses on coping and mediating relationships.*

Evidence suggests that students of color may routinely encounter racism on their university campuses (Gay, 2004; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Gonzalez, 2006, 2007; Hurtado, 1994; Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie, & Sanders, 1997; Solem, Lee, & Schlemper, 2009; Solórzano, 1998; Turner & Thompson, 1993). However, most research on race and racism in higher education focuses on undergraduate students' experiences (e.g., Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Museus & Truong, 2009; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). These studies reveal how experiencing racism has negative psychological, physiological, and academic implications for undergraduates of color. They also show that toxic

campus racial climates have a negative relationship with college adjustment, persistence, and baccalaureate degree completion.

Comparatively, very little has been documented about graduate students of color and how they cope with and resolve issues related to racism (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2006; Hurtado, 1994; Solórzano, 1998). Doctoral students of color are often a very small minority in their respective academic departments or programs and thus are highly visible (Gay, 2004). Due to these frequent levels of underrepresentation, and the power dynamics that exist between faculty and graduate students, doctoral students of color are in particularly vulnerable positions. Indeed, they could suffer political and professional consequences, such as faculty stripping them of opportunities to conduct research or tarnishing their reputations, which could lead to negative psychological and professional repercussions (Truong, 2010; Truong & Museus, 2011). In addition, because doctoral students of color have more years of experience than undergraduate students in successfully navigating racially hostile educational spaces, it is possible that they have more developed and unique ways of coping with racism and racial trauma in higher education.

The purpose of this study is to understand how the doctoral students of color participating in our study cope with and respond to racism and racial trauma. In the following sections, we review the literature on racism, racial trauma, and coping as it relates to populations of color and doctoral students of color. We then discuss the current study and conclude with implications for research and practice.

## Racism, Racism-Related Stress, and Racial Trauma

Racism can be defined as

a system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial-group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of a group defined or perceived by dominant-group members as inferior, deviant, or undesirable; and occurring in circumstances where members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege by maintaining structures, ideology, values, and behavior that have the intent or effect of leaving nondominant-group members relatively excluded from power, esteem, status, and/or equal access to societal resources. (Harrell, 2000, p. 43)

In addition, a racist environment benefits racial in-groups that can maintain influence over racial out-group members' experiences and access to resources.

Two important race-related concepts discussed in existing literature are racism-related stress and racial trauma (Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Carter, Forsyth, Mazzula, & Williams, 2005; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Harrell, 2000). While stress and trauma can be perceived as two very different phenomena, the distinctions between racism-related stress and racial trauma in existing literature are unclear. Researchers have used these

terms interchangeably, describing trauma as a cause of racism-related stress (e.g., intergenerational trauma) and as a type of stress (e.g., traumatic stress) (e.g., Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter, 2007; Harrell, 2000). For the purposes of the current study, based on existing literature (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Carter et al., 2005; Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000), we define racism-related stress as the emotional, physical, and psychological discomfort and pain resulting from experiences with racism, and we use the term *racial trauma* to denote severe cases of racism-related stress.

Researchers have highlighted the fact that racism is a stressor that has significant negative psychological ramifications for victims of racial oppression (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Carter et al., 2005; Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000). Specifically, racism-related stress and racial trauma are consequences of racialized interactions between individuals or groups and their environment. Harrell (2000) identifies six types of situations in which racism-related stress and racial trauma occur: “racism-related life events, vicarious racism experiences, daily racism microstressors, chronic-contextual stress, collective experiences of racism, and the transgenerational transmission of group traumas” (p. 45). Moreover, Stevenson (2003) notes that experiencing racist situations that cannot be resolved results in racism-related stress and racial trauma. Some consequences of racism-related stress may include experiencing depression, headaches, anxiety, low self-esteem, humiliation, upset stomach, chest pains, tunnel vision, ulcers, back pains, nightmares, loss of appetite or overeating, nausea, shortness of breath, weeping, vomiting, fatigue, increased heart rate and hypertension, anger and frustration, difficulty concentrating, lack of productivity and motivation, sleep deprivation, and recounting specific racist situations days, weeks, months, and years after they occur as if they happened more recently (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000; Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007).

### Coping with Racism and Racial Trauma

Coping with racism and racial trauma is a complex process that demands mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical energy and effort (Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009; Carter, 2007; Cheng, 2003). Individuals must have knowledge of the strategies that they can use in specific situations and must also consider how those strategies might trigger particular responses and result in being further or less oppressed (Cheng, 2003). For example, coping methods, such as utilizing social support, might lead individuals to experience additional psychological, emotional, and physiological consequences, such as having to relive the experience while trying to rationalize it (Carter, 2007; Sanders Thompson, 2006). In addition, people who experience

racism and use particular coping strategies, such as confronting an oppressor, may experience further marginalization.

The coping strategies that people of color use depend on several factors, including their racial socialization experiences, racial identity development, personal experiences, collective experiences, individual characteristics, and situational characteristics (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Brondolo et al., 2009; Bynum, Burton, & Best, 2007; Carter, 2007; Cheng, 2003; Harrell, 2000). For example, the ways that a person is racially socialized can lead to the development of meta-analytic critical consciousness through self-knowledge and appreciation of culture (Stevenson, 2003). Harrell (2000) states that “family structure and dynamics shape the nature and quality of social relationships, communication style, and strategies for dealing with conflict, all of which affect the ways in which the individual copes with racism” (p. 50). Parents often relay messages to their children about race, such as proactive expressions that they are beautiful and intelligent or protective expressions that include talking to their children about how to speak with the police or details about others’ worldviews of them. They can also teach their children more about the family history, culture, and religion as well as about collective experiences with racism. These multiple messages may give children of color a more comprehensive sense of where they fit within the system of oppression, facilitate racial identity development, and catalyze the coping process with racism (Brondolo et al., 2009; Harrell, 2000; Stevenson, 2003).

Because different racial and ethnic groups sometimes experience racism in disparate ways, coping styles may also differ across those various racial and ethnic populations (Brondolo et al., 2009; Harrell, 2000; Sanders Thompson, 2006). People also develop coping styles based on their personal experiences with racism (Cheng, 2003; Harrell, 2000). For instance, people of color who have experienced racism throughout their lives may have a more diverse set of coping strategies to draw from than those who have very few experiences with it. Even so, those who have a sophisticated set of experiences coping with racism may also encounter difficulties in certain situations (Cheng, 2003). For example, when time-sensitive responses are required, these individuals might engage their most commonly used response or may decide to respond in haste rather than weigh other response options (Cheng, 2003).

Numerous coping models exist to explain how people and communities of color respond to racism (e.g., Brondolo et al., 2009; Danoff-Burg, Prelow, & Swenson, 2004; Mellor, 2004; Sanders Thompson, 2006; Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Most of the models on coping are race-specific, and many of them are limited in that they do not explain ways that the victim managed relationships with the oppressor. In addition, these models do not include methods for healing. Many coping models focus on dealing with the specific race-related problems, but do not provide strategies for how people of color can cope with knowing that racism is permanent. Many of the strategies provided in these models are similar to those drawn from the general literature on

stress and coping. For example, seeking support can be found both in the literature on coping with racism as well as in the general literature on stress and coping. While these models seem to be more general, other models incorporate culturally relevant frameworks to help specific populations cope with racism. More specifically, they incorporate principles of African American psychology, which relies heavily on collectivity and spirituality and the notion of multiple perspectives (Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000). These inventories explain how those affected by racism understand the world in which they live. Specifically, the inventories illuminate how individuals see racism as oppressive and how they can also use their knowledge and skills to cope with racism.

Strategies for coping with racism can be lumped into three categories: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and support-seeking (Mellor, 2004). Problem-focused coping occurs when the victim responds directly to the racism. Essentially, problem-focused coping looks at the environment or specific racialized incidents and how things can be resolved. An example of problem-focused coping is to have a physical altercation with the oppressor. Emotion-focused coping is characterized by avoidance. Examples of this form of coping include detachment and internalization of the racism. While seeking support can fall under both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, it is often placed in its own separate category (Brondolo et al., 2009; Danoff-Burg et al., 2004; Mellor, 2004; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003; Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000). Those who seek social support from others may do it to ensure their well-being by gaining sympathy from people in their environment or to solicit an intervention from someone who can advocate for them and respond directly to the oppressor.

Mellor (2004) also presents an inventory of coping responses that includes defensive, controlled, and offensive responses (see table 1). The first group, defensive responses, refers to cases in which the victims defend themselves from the racism by having a defeatist attitude (e.g., accepting the racism and withdrawing or denying one's racial identity). The second group, controlled responses, also encompasses responses that are not aimed at the racist situation or the perpetrator directly (e.g., ignoring the racist incident and not responding). Mellor's final group focuses on individuals' direct responses to racism (e.g., educating the oppressor and demanding better treatment). Mellor's model gives an overview of coping strategies people of color may use to respond specifically to racism. Mellor's taxonomy<sup>1</sup> does not fully capture the experiences of doctoral students of color or their breadth of coping strategies, but it is a useful guide for analyzing data on how they respond to racial trauma and racist encounters in the educational context. The current study is intended to build on the work of Mellor and to generate a new taxonomy that specifically takes the range of coping strategies employed by doctoral students of color into account.

TABLE 1 *Summary of Mellor's taxonomy of coping styles*

<i>Group 1 Defensive Responses</i>	<i>Group 2 Controlled Responses</i>	<i>Group 3 Direct Responses</i>
1. Accepting racism by withdrawing, feeling helpless, and avoidance	1. Ignoring the incident(s)	1. Educating the oppressor
2. Reassessing the situation to see that the oppressor will not change and accepting oneself	2. Wanting to respond but deciding not to	2. Calling out racism
3. Having a support network	3. Thinking of ways that they could have responded but did not	3. Demanding better treatment
4. Denying one's own racial identity		4. Being proud of one's racial identity and displaying it
5. Achieving		5. Taking control of the situation by responding before the oppressor commits an act or making light of the situation
6. Racially socializing their children		6. Getting people to intervene on one's behalf
		7. Seeking revenge verbally or physically

Source: Mellor (2004).

### Coping with Racism in Doctoral Programs

Several scholars have empirically examined how undergraduates cope with racism on campus (e.g., Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Clark, 2004; Danoff-Burg et al., 2004; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Liang, Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2007; Swim et al., 2003; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000). This body of research indicates that undergraduates who experience racism are able to cope in various ways, such as seeking support, identifying problem-focused actions, using emotion-focused coping styles, and relying on spirituality. These studies also note the existence of gender differences in the way students cope. For example, African American and Asian American female undergraduates are more likely than their male counterparts to respond directly to racism (Clark, 2004; Liang et al., 2007; Swim et al., 2003), while Asian American male undergraduates are more likely to cope by seeking support than their female peers (Liang et al., 2007).

To date, only two studies have examined how doctoral students of color cope with racism in the academy. This gap is particularly noteworthy because doctoral students of color have advanced to the last stage of the education pipeline and therefore can provide especially valuable information regarding how to succeed in education despite experiences with racism and racial trauma. In the first inquiry into doctoral students' experiences coping with racism, Gonzalez (2006) studied thirteen Latina doctoral students across eight campuses to understand how they were academically socialized in their doctoral programs and how they coped with racism at their institutions. He out-

lines both productive and unproductive forms of coping. For instance, productive acts of coping include finding a support network or a counterspace that enables the participants to discuss their experiences with racism, responding directly to misconceptions and racism, getting support from faculty within and outside the department, and achieving academically. Unproductive acts of coping include ones in which the students remain marginalized, such as avoiding contact with oppressors, transferring out of programs, assimilating, disengaging in course content or not attending class at all, being isolated and silenced by others, and developing a distaste for academia. These unsuccessful coping methods are associated with racism-related stress.

In the second study, Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) examined the everyday experiences of twenty-two Latino and Black doctoral students enrolled mainly in education programs at three different universities. They found that a common narrative emerged relating to the oppressive nature of the socialization process and the hostile environment that participants had to navigate. They found that participants (1) internalized the negative messages they were receiving about themselves; (2) chose to disengage from participating in conversations or activities in which they were targeted; (3) reported assimilating in ways that would help them to fit in better; (4) reported not speaking up about lack of faculty research expertise on race because they did not want to be perceived as disgruntled; and (5) relied on their peers to provide them with support and encouragement throughout the process.

There are important limitations to the two aforementioned studies. The first is with regard to sample composition. Since Gonzalez's (2006) inquiry was limited to Latina students, how his findings apply to other doctoral students of color is unknown. While Gildersleeve and his colleagues' (2011) study included Black and Latino doctoral students, most of their participants attended public institutions and enrolled in education programs. Thus, it is unclear whether their findings apply to doctoral students in other disciplines. The current study includes participants with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and who are enrolled at both public and private institutions and in a variety of disciplines.

Second, Gonzalez's categorization of coping mechanisms as productive and unproductive may be problematic, since the same strategies may result in different outcomes for different people or for the same person under different conditions. In addition, people who avoid social situations in which they are likely to encounter racism are sometimes protecting themselves from subsequent racist incidents and, thus, may consider this form of coping to be effective. The current study expands on the work of Gonzalez and Gildersleeve and colleagues by providing a more comprehensive discussion of coping strategies used among doctoral students of color experiencing racism in their programs, and by presenting a taxonomy of coping strategies used by twenty-six of these students.

## Purpose of the Study

The current investigation is a direct response to calls for more research on the ways that students of color respond to racism (Hurtado, 1994; Solórzano, 1998). The study is part of a larger qualitative investigation to understand the experiences of doctoral students of color with racism and racial trauma and how they respond to these challenges. The result, as we discuss below, is an inventory for coping with and responding to racism and racial trauma in doctoral study. One central question guided the current study: How do twenty-six doctoral students of color who have experienced racism and racial trauma in the context of their doctoral programs navigate, negotiate, and resolve the complexities associated with these highly politicized situations?

## Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Mellor's (2004) taxonomy of coping styles informed the conceptual framework for this study. CRT is interdisciplinary, as it draws from the fields of law, sociology, economics, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies in the pursuit of racial justice (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, 2000; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). CRT places race at the center of discourse because it is a normal part of everyday life and because racism is a permanent fixture in society (Bergerson, 2003).

CRT recognizes the unique perspectives and experiences of people of color in analyzing and understanding racism (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Harper et al., 2009; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2004). In so doing, it acknowledges that people of color are producers of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2004). Mirroring this emphasis, we centered our analysis on participants' own accounts and interpretations of their responses to racism and racial trauma.

One concept that has emerged from CRT is Yosso's (2005) notion of navigational capital. This idea is particularly useful for the current examination because it recognizes that people of color have knowledge in navigating spaces that were not meant for them. In the context of the current study, navigational capital suggests that doctoral students of color possess valuable knowledge and skills that enable them to make meaning of and navigate their racialized experiences in the academy. The participants in the current study reported their racial realities to us and we acknowledged them as such. Thus, in the current analysis, we use navigational capital to understand how doctoral students of color have been able to succeed in racially hostile educational environments through their own accounts of their lived experiences.

Mellor's (2004) coping taxonomy comprised another element of the conceptual framework for the current analysis. As mentioned, Mellor provided



a continuum of strategies for responding to racism that focuses specifically on coping actions. The continuum includes defensive, controlled, and direct responses to racism (see table 1). While Mellor's taxonomy does not fully capture the experiences of doctoral students of color, it does provide a framework for making sense of how doctoral students of color might cope with racial trauma. Together, CRT, theoretical perspectives of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), and Mellor's taxonomy provide a useful conceptual framework for the current study that underscores the prevalence of racism in the lives of doctoral students of color, recognizes that doctoral students possess knowledge about how to negotiate spaces that were not meant for them, and provides an understanding of the possible strategies that those students use to cope with that racism.

## Research Design

We used qualitative research methods to conduct the current study. These tools are ideal for generating rich descriptions and gaining in-depth understandings of existing phenomena (Creswell, 2003). Specifically, phenomenology is an ideal qualitative approach for this study, as it examines the lived experiences of individuals as they relate to their consciousness and perceptions (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology captures the meanings and essences of phenomena being studied (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, we employed phenomenological methods because we sought to understand our doctoral student participants' lived experiences as they cope with racial trauma they suffered in their graduate programs.

### *Site and Participant Selection*

We recruited participants by distributing a questionnaire widely over the Internet (i.e., via e-mail and Facebook). Three hundred and sixty prospective participants filled out the online questionnaire. Of those, a subset of individuals was invited to take part in the study based on three criteria. First, the students must have been enrolled in doctoral programs and have completed at least one year of course work in their respective programs or have graduated within the past three years. Second, participants must have self-identified as belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group (e.g., Asian American, Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander) and be American citizens or permanent residents. Third, the participants must have experienced racism and racial trauma.

### *Description of Participants*

The final sample consisted of twenty-six participants. Of those twenty-six, twenty were doctoral students of color and six were recent doctoral graduates of color. The participants represented the disciplines of anthropology, biomedical science, biostatistics, business, communications, education, his-

tory, psychology, public health, sociology, social work and social welfare, and women's studies. Students enrolled in doctoral programs at the time of the interviews had completed between one and six years of doctoral study; the mean number of years completed was 3.15. Self-reported grade point averages ranged from 3.3 to 4.0, with a mean of 3.7. The participants ranged in age from twenty-six to sixty-three years. Seventeen participants were women and nine were men. Three of the participants self-identified as Asian American, and more specifically Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese American; eleven as African American or Black; two as Chicana; four as Mexican American; five as multiracial; and one as Native American.

Ten students pursued doctorates at private institutions and sixteen at public institutions. Twenty-one different institutions are represented in the sample. Based on Carnegie Classifications (2010), eighteen of the twenty-one institutions were large in size, while one was small and one was medium size. A majority of the institutions were research universities, thirteen with "very high research activity" and four with "high research activity" (Carnegie Classifications, 2010). Sixteen of the institutions were located in cities, two in rural areas, and three in suburbs and towns (NCES, 2010).

#### *Data Collection*

The primary source of data collected in this study was from semistructured individual interviews with the participants. A semistructured protocol makes it easier for the researcher to ask follow-up questions. The interview protocol consisted of several topics related to the experiences of doctoral students of color. The manner in which these questions were ordered made it possible to have a conversation with participants and engage them in a way that helped us better understand their experiences (Glesne, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The semistructured protocol constituted guidelines to follow with interview participants while also providing the flexibility to probe further with additional questions in order to understand the phenomena. The interviews lasted between one and four hours each, but most were approximately two hours long. These interviews provided rich data regarding students' experiences with racism and racial trauma. In addition, they gave valuable insights into how these students were able to respond to racist situations.

#### *Data Analysis*

Throughout the data analysis phase, we used methods suggested by Moustakas (1994). We read, coded, and analyzed each of the twenty-six interview transcripts without making judgments or interpretations. We read the transcripts a second time and, following bracketing procedures prescribed by Moustakas, reflected on our own experiences and biases as they applied to the data analysis. During the third reading of each transcript, we constructed codes to highlight significant quotes and statements that participants made as they related to their lived experiences as doctoral students of color. We then organized

these codes into thematic categories, which generated a deeper understanding of the essences of the phenomena. We drafted structural descriptions of *what* the doctoral students of color experienced and textural descriptions of *how* the doctoral students experienced racism and racial trauma, as well as how they navigated through their racist encounters. The textual and structural descriptions, along with the thematic categories, guided the presentation of the findings.

#### *Trustworthiness and Quality Assurance*

We employed Lincoln and Guba's (1986) framework for ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of findings. We conducted member checks, convened a peer debriefing team, created an audit trail, and held follow-up interviews with participants. Member checks were conducted by confirming the accuracy of interview transcripts before the data analysis. In addition, we shared the analyses of participants' lived experiences with them and invited feedback. When data needed clarification or additional information, we conducted follow-up interviews. We convened a peer debriefing team consisting of people who study race issues and qualitative research methods to provide feedback on interpretations of the data. The seven members of the peer debriefing team were three faculty members, two doctoral students, and two educators interested in pursuing doctoral studies. These educators possessed master's degrees and had completed course work in qualitative methods and race.

#### Limitations

Because it was not our intent to generalize, our findings may not be immediately transferable to other doctoral students of color. This may be particularly true for international doctoral students of color, whose racialized experiences may be different from those of U.S.-born or naturalized doctoral students of color because they are not yet sensitized to the racialized context in which they live and to their minority status in the United States. Selection bias is a second limitation of this study. We interviewed students who were willing to share their time and racialized experiences with us. However, there may be other doctoral students of color who could have shared valuable insights into their experiences but did not receive or respond to the recruitment solicitations.

#### Role of the Researchers

It is important to consider the role of the researcher in all forms of inquiry, but particularly so in qualitative research, as the researcher is the instrument for data collection (Patton, 2002). In this study, our background knowledge of higher education, qualitative research, and race and racism in postsecondary

education, as well as our personal experiences with racist encounters, informed the study. It is also important to note that, prior to conducting the current analysis, we believed that race and racism shaped the experiences of doctoral students of color. This professional and personal knowledge informed the design of the study, the interview protocol, the process of conducting interviews, analysis and interpretation of the data, and presentation of the findings. In addition, throughout the study, we maintained awareness of our own biases by bracketing our own experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In this way, we were able to disclose our own personal experiences and perceptions of racism and trauma while employing the empirical transcendental phenomenological approach to the study.

## Findings

All participants experienced both overt and subtle racism in their doctoral programs. The following are themes related to how they experienced racism: oneliness and isolation; identity intersectionality; differential support and investment; low expectations, high standards; role of funding; exploitation of students; neglect; devaluing of research on race; reproduction of racism by people of color; cumulative effects of racial microaggressions; secondhand racism; and violations of institutional and federal policies. These experiences led doctoral students of color to develop symptoms of racial trauma, such as anger, shock, self-doubt, depression, dissociation, physical pain, and spiritual pain. The participants identified the racism they experienced as the source of the stress and racial trauma they endured. The coping mechanisms they used were in response to these racialized experiences. For example, a multiracial participant describes the process in which she experienced racial trauma from several incidents that included false complaints from a peer and professor, microaggressions in the classroom from instructors, and the department chair targeting her for dismissal.

It is a definite process of dehumanization, where ultimately you don't even recognize that you're a person anymore. You can't interact as a person anymore. I felt debilitated. I felt for sure depressed. I felt lost and confused. I've gone through so much, your belly aches and it's like your insides hurt . . . Your body becomes mutated and grotesque in odd ways because it can't really function well without its spirit.

While our analysis separated responses into internal, controlled, and external categories, it is important to note that participants used multiple coping and mediation methods in response to the racism and racial trauma they experienced. For example, all participants reported using methods that fall under at least two of the three categories and several of the subcategories. A majority of the participants employed responses from all three categories. Also, the responses were not "one size fits all" solutions. Some of the participants used

TABLE 2 *Inventory of coping styles among doctoral students of color*

<i>Group 1 Internal Responses</i>	<i>Group 2 Controlled Responses</i>	<i>Group 3 External Responses</i>
1. Utilizing social support	1. Suppressing reactions	1. Speaking up
2. Avoiding racist environments	2. Strategic maneuvering	2. Documenting and filing complaints
3. Engaging religion and spirituality	3. Seeking intervention	3. Reconstructing committees
4. Seeking treatment	4. Switching advisers	
5. Achieving as resistance	5. Transferring out	
6. Advocating for peers of color		
7. Relieving stress through hobbies		
8. Reflecting on racism		
9. Preparing for racist encounters		

the same strategies with varying levels of effectiveness as defined by the participants themselves. In addition, the effectiveness of these strategies depended on the individual situation, the parties involved, and the institutional context in which the racism was experienced.

In the following sections, we delineate the various coping strategies used by participants to respond to racism and racial trauma. Because of the numerous types of responses reported and limited space, we provide brief descriptions of each type of coping response discussed by our interviewees. The various coping responses reported by participants are summarized in table 2.

*Internal Responses*

Internal responses refer to strategies that doctoral students use individually and internally to ensure their own physical and psychological well-being. All twenty-six participants reported that they used internal responses to cope with the racism they experienced in their doctoral studies. We identified nine types of internal responses:

- Utilizing social support
- Avoiding racist environments
- Engaging in religion and spirituality
- Seeking treatment
- Achieving as resistance
- Advocating for peers of color
- Relieving stress through hobbies
- Reflecting on racism
- Preparing for racist encounters

— Utilizing Social Support

Participants discussed their experiences, challenges, thoughts, and feelings about the racism that they experienced with others in critical support networks. Those networks were comprised of diverse populations inside and outside participants' institutional settings, and they offered those students academic, emotional, and social support. The networks included family members, friends, romantic partners and spouses, roommates, and administrators and faculty at other institutions. One Asian American male participant, for example, reflected on the importance of peer social support: "We keep each other encouraged and I think it's great. We tell each other that had the other person not been there at the right place at the right time that we probably wouldn't have gotten as far as we have gotten now."

Within their institutions, participants sought support from their advisers, professors inside and outside of their departments, administrators, peers inside and outside of their departments, assistantship or employment supervisors, student organization leaders, national fellowship administrators, and students who were enrolled in their programs previously. A few students discussed the racism that they experienced with White faculty and friends, but most of them emphasized support from people of color. In addition, some participants had supportive White advisers but did not feel comfortable confiding in them about their racialized experiences, fearing that they would not understand.

— Avoiding Racist Environments

After experiencing the effects of racial trauma, such as stomach pains, physical paralyses, feelings of dehumanization, and depression, participants reported intentionally avoiding spaces and situations in which they might experience more racism. One multiracial student explained:

I was trying to find a space to turn to, and one of the ways of coping was to talk to people. But when you can't find anybody to talk to, who will see you as a human being or sit with you in the pain, you know that there are no safe spaces. I would isolate myself.

Two participants admitted that while their isolation was a reaction to their external environments, the people within their programs isolated them too. Their peers avoided speaking with them yet gossiped about them behind their backs. Faculty also ignored them in the classroom and avoided making eye contact.

Four of the participants discussed how merely coming in contact with the physical environment of their institutions made them experience symptoms of racial trauma. Several of the participants reported that on entering the school building, they started to feel physical pain and nausea. They avoided their departments and other campus buildings where they had experienced racism. Two participants moved out of state immediately after they completed

course work to ensure that they would not have to deal with the everyday experiences of racism, such as being ignored, low expectations, higher standards, and differential treatment, that they routinely encountered in their doctoral programs and on their campuses.

— Engaging in Religion and Spirituality

Participants reflected on how religion and spirituality helped them cope with their racialized experiences. One student, for example, sought spiritual guidance from a Buddhist monk. Two participants discussed karma, a core element of Buddhism that suggests that people experience what they deserve based on their previous actions, and this helped them to forgive and let go of some of their feelings of anger. Several Christian participants discussed coping through reading the Bible, attending church, and praying. Religion also helped one Black male participant understand racism as a form of unavoidable suffering:

I think one of the things that has helped me deal with the racism has been my faith. My faith has definitely helped keep it in perspective and help me move forward, sort of helped me see it as a challenge that you respond to and you move on—that we were all here and we all have some type of a cross that we are bearing as we go through this thing called life. It helps me keep a perspective and not be bitter and not think negatively and lump all Whites in one group and take that type of attitude toward saying, “This it tends to be; White people are all this way.”

— Seeking Treatment

Students experienced psychological and physiological consequences, and one-third sought treatment from health-care providers or psychological services. Students were diagnosed and received advice and medications to reduce stress, as well as medical treatment for physical manifestations of their racial trauma, such as hair loss, mysterious rashes, rapid weight loss, severe gastritis, and aggravated polycystic kidney disease. One African American female student participated in sessions with counselors at school. She referred to it as “talk therapy,” where she was able to discuss her experiences and feelings with a therapist who provided feedback and checked in with her regularly. One Mexican American female participant took part in both individual and group counseling sessions. The individual counseling helped her reflect on her own experiences. The group counseling provided her an outlet for sharing her experiences and a chance to listen to other women doctoral students of color who had also encountered racism.

— Achieving as Resistance

All of the participants managed to do well academically, and several of them emphasized during the interviews the importance of succeeding as a form of

resistance. Most participants had experienced low expectations from advisers, faculty members, and peers. Several participants reported how faculty told them they should quit doctoral studies or informed others that the students were not going to graduate. The participants also stated that peers treated them like they did not belong in their respective programs. One participant discussed how her peers made a bet that she was going to fail a course. They stated that their motivation to do well came from wanting to prove they were capable of succeeding. One African American male participant stated:

My drive stems from wanting to prove [a faculty member] wrong. I don't like the fact that I'm driven by wanting to prove this White man wrong, so, in some sense, he still has power over me. But it's what fuels me. It's what makes me want to do what I do.

Other participants reported that faculty members found fault with their work, scrutinizing it more than that of their White peers. These participants responded by being extremely prepared for class and turning in high-quality work.

In addition to achieving academically, participants reported taking part in research projects that would help them gain experience outside the classroom. This also helped these students take their minds off of racialized experiences. Several conducted independent research with faculty and published in peer-reviewed journals.

#### — Advocating for Peers of Color

More than one-third of the participants reported that they coped by helping other students of color. They started their own student organizations, served in student government, and provided counseling and advice to their peers. These activities provided opportunities for participants to share some of their personal stories while helping others experiencing racism and racial trauma. Several of the participants also reported how they reached out to newer students or struggling peers to provide them with support and advice. Two multiracial men in particular described how they regularly communicated with other students of color in the program to give them advice about how to navigate racist situations. In addition, these participants engaged in efforts to contribute to the research literature on the racialized experiences of doctoral students of color. Some eagerly participated in this study to give prospective and current students strategies for navigating the political complexities of their racist encounters. One Asian American participant discussed what it meant for her to be a part of the study:

It was really good . . . I think me wanting to be interviewed is me hoping that something can come of this that's greater than myself and the students that are involved in it will help shape a voice for all these kinds of experiences that people should not be having in doctoral studies.



— Relieving Stress Through Hobbies

Students talked about how their hobbies provided relief from racism-related stress. One African American female student explained:

In terms of having to deal with it, you cope . . . You don't have a choice. You develop a hobby. I think when I was experiencing racial trauma I took vocal lessons. What else did I do? I took up kickboxing . . . I did a bunch of different hobbies to take my mind off of it, to hopefully de-stress and exercise at the same time.

One student found time to play with her puppy, while another practiced yoga as a way to reduce stress. Breathing exercises and meditation helped one participant take his mind off of issues at school and stay focused on meeting his goals. Several students reported that exercising, like kickboxing and running, helped alleviate the racism-related stress they experienced.

— Reflecting on Racism

All participants reflected on the racism that they experienced in their academic programs and departments. Several participants recorded their thoughts and feelings through journaling, which helped at least one participant come to the realization that her doctoral experiences were excruciatingly painful. One Black female participant discussed how she used journals to cope:

I have actually three or four journals, just trying to process life in graduate school and trying to make myself adapt to it and coming to the realization that people don't care and my [adviser] was really just a boss and he didn't really care about any of the difficulties. I mean, it was really a terrible pain.

This participant reported experiencing anger, depression, stomach pains, ulcers, bleeding, acid reflux, insomnia, and post-traumatic stress, among other symptoms. Participating in the interviews for this study also helped some participants cope with their experiences with racism and racial trauma.

— Preparing for Racist Encounters

Four male participants and one female mentioned how they were prepared to experience racism. They knew that, based on their skin color and gender, people would treat them differently. Therefore, they accepted that racism was inevitable and came to expect it. One multiracial participant described his outlook walking into a room:

Modifying my expectations is probably my number-one strategy for dealing with the stress. If I actually go into a room expecting to be treated like everyone else and . . . don't, then there is anger and frustration and stress . . . I have to just accept the fact that no matter what I do, I will never be treated the same way, and although it may not be pleasant, that's life. Suck it up. Deal with it.

### *Controlled Responses*

Controlled responses refer to cases in which participants, expecting negative consequences from challenging racism, indirectly deal with racist experiences either by restraining or removing themselves from racially toxic environments. Each participant who employed controlled responses was well aware of the politics of higher education and attempted to avoid political backlash that might result from confronting perpetrators of racism. Unlike undergraduate studies, doctoral education is much more specialized. Several of the participants discussed how their advisers and professors could make it difficult for them in the field because it is so small and everyone is connected. We identified five types of controlled responses:

- Suppressing reactions
- Strategic maneuvering
- Soliciting intervention
- Switching advisers
- Transferring out

#### — Suppressing Reactions

Participants often discussed how they avoided confronting their oppressors. For example, when faculty members were the oppressors, participants wanted to maintain relationships in order to get recommendations and support. Therefore, they employed tactics such as writing papers to their professors' liking even when the papers did not reflect their own thinking. One Black participant described how she approached and communicated with her adviser: "Basically, I put on the face. I put on this face of 'whatever you say is right.' It's like being, 'Okay, whatever you say is fine.'" Another Black participant asserted, "It is a matter of just staying calm even though at the time you feel like actually strangling somebody." Several of the participants had a limit to how much racism they could endure and then reached a threshold at which point they utilized external responses.

#### — Strategic Maneuvering

Over time, participants learned to evaluate situations and respond accordingly. For example, a multiracial participant described how she performed Whiteness to help her cope with the racism that she experienced within her department. Specifically, she observed Whites and then imitated their mannerisms, the way they spoke, and other actions. She stated that "one thing that I do is survey and profile, and out of that I develop strategies and tactics for maneuvering." She felt that her classmates became less threatened by her when she did this. This performance was part of a system that she constructed to navigate and negotiate the political complexities of her racist encounters.

— Soliciting Intervention

Participants also discussed soliciting intervention from faculty and administrators within the university. For example, some participants talked to the ombudsperson at their institutions, met with administrators at all levels of the university, attended board of trustees meetings to get their attention and make them aware of racial issues at their universities, or relied on people who provided them with advice about navigating and negotiating academia. One multiracial male participant describes how his advisers helped him navigate the politics of academia:

Any situation I've had, even the ones I can't confront head on, I go and talk to them about it . . . Situations I've had with other students, situations I've had with faculty, family situations, anything . . . I realize I'm incredibly lucky because I know that many of my colleagues do not have advisers that are willing to help students navigate politically.

It is worth noting that this student's faculty advisers understood his racialized experiences because they had similar experiences as faculty of color navigating academia. Several other participants discussed how important it was for them to have mentors of color in the academy who understood their situations and could provide this type of guidance to them on how to cope with and respond to racism in this setting.

— Switching Advisers

Participants discussed switching advisers because of the racism they experienced. This is a significant event, because the nature of advising relationships is particularly important in doctoral studies, as it could mean the difference between succeeding in doctoral studies or not having the support needed to progress in one's program. One African American male participant decided to switch advisers after numerous gendered and racist encounters with her. For example, during one situation, she humiliated him in front of his peers by disregarding his accomplishments and saying that she was the reason that he was admitted to the program. Another example of these gendered and racist encounters was her initiating several highly inappropriate conversations with him about sex that objectified him and other Black men. The participant explained that an accumulation of these experiences caused the participant severe emotional and physical pain:

I knew that that process would be highly, highly political . . . so I waited for a while to go through switching advisers. After many stomach pains as a result of dealing with this woman, and after many trips to my therapist, I thought at one point that this stress isn't worth it [and is bad] for my mental health! That's when I ultimately ended up switching advisers.

All participants who switched advisers had negative racialized experiences with their initial advisers but were able to develop relationships with new advis-

ers. In clarifying the decision to move from one adviser to another, they publicly articulated alternative explanations, such as better research interest alignment or more funding opportunities.

— Transferring Out

Two African American participants transferred out of their programs to departments at other institutions. Transferring out could be quite risky, as the process is time consuming. The transfer institution may not agree to accept transfer credits, thereby making time to degree longer. In addition, these students took the risk of enrolling in another institution where they could have possibly encountered racism. Fortunately, both of the participants had positive experiences going through the transfer process and enrolling in their new programs. One of the participants transferred from a program that required her to take extra courses and where her adviser provided no support. She reported that at her previous institution, she was singled out by her program to take designated methodological classes that were not relevant to her research interests. Other students were not required to take these courses. She was carefully monitored by her adviser and the program director throughout the semester. In addition, she had to meet with them at the end of each semester to track her progress. At one point, she expressed interest in enrolling in a methodological class that was relevant to her interests, but was told, “There’s no guarantee that you’ll make it to dissertation stage anyways so you need to take this class.” Her adviser at the new institution was fully aware of her racialized experiences and was extremely supportive and committed to helping her succeed academically. She explained:

The negative experiences that I had were actually a blessing in disguise, because I’m in a different program now. I’m getting the publications. I’m working at another well-known institution and getting publications there too. So I actually ended up better, I think, and I think things happen for a reason.

The other participant transferred because his experiences with a particular professor left him experiencing severe psychological and physiological pain. The faculty member talked down to students of color in the program, providing them no support. The professor criticized the participant’s work, questioned his abilities, and made him feel like he was not qualified to be enrolled in the program. The participant reported symptoms such as waking up throughout the night, reliving racist experiences, stomach pains, and ulcers. He confided in another professor who provided him with support and mentoring. When this mentor left the school, he transferred along with that faculty member. He, too, had a more positive experience after he transferred.

*External Responses*

External responses are approaches that participants took to directly address the racism they experienced by altering the environments in which they

encountered those experiences. Most students employing these strategies were aware of the political complexities of their situations but were not concerned about the consequences. Some felt the obligation to speak up to prevent others from having to encounter similar experiences. We outline three external responses below:

- Speaking up
- Documenting and filing complaints
- Reconstructing committees

In some instances, these strategies worked for participants and they experienced no political backlash. In other circumstances, participants faced retaliation and reexperienced racial trauma.

#### — Speaking Up

Participants reported speaking up in response to racism. For example, several students spoke up in the classroom against professors and peers who made ignorant comments. One female Native American student from the Blackfeet Nation explained how she gave one of her professors a lesson by illustrating through storytelling how his actions were hurtful and damaging. She told him about the “five little devils” after he spoke disparagingly about non-Christians during a class lecture. She explained,

The first little devil is that we stop caring. The second little devil is we make others feel inferior. The third little devil is we envy. The fourth little devil we have is resentment. And the fifth little devil is jealousy. And so I took those five little devils and I showed him how he stopped caring about other people and belief systems of the world and made them inferior and taught that we should envy all Christians because everyone else is inferior and that he was teaching people to resent people of other faiths . . . and that was hurtful and damaging.

A multiracial male student described an instance in which he had to speak up after his professor allowed another student to refer to mixed people using the derogatory term “mutts”:

I am the only nonwhite person in the room . . . I raised my hand to comment. My instructor sort of gives me a glance and ignores me and proceeds to try to move on to someone else . . . I end up shooting him an e-mail saying, “Look, this is ridiculous. I shouldn’t be responsible for creating a respectful classroom atmosphere for myself. That’s your job. That’s what you’re here for. And, instead of making this a teachable moment, you just sat here and blew it off because you thought your White students’ discomfort was more important than mine, than maintaining a respectful environment for me.” And his response was, “I didn’t see any malice in the comment. I didn’t think he was trying to be insulting, and basically you’re just too sensitive.”

The participants also educated people who made ignorant comments outside of class and when they witnessed injustice on campus.

— Documenting and Filing Complaints

Participants discussed how they documented their experiences and shared them with others, including ombudspersons, offices for students with disabilities, associate deans, boards of trustees, provosts, vice presidents of graduate studies, and offices of student conduct. One multiracial participant discussed how she documented and filed a complaint about how her department chair singled her out, did not assign her a faculty adviser, told other faculty in her department that she would not succeed, and called her at home to advise her to quit the program.

I tried to make an appointment with our graduate dean and I couldn't. So, what I did was I wrote her a letter and I sent it by mail, and also sent out three other letters to people of color that had positions of power at our university . . . I started to tell my story in a way [so] that people that were in charge realized that there was a potential lawsuit. And, things started to change once I started to go to the [trustee] meetings as a student and I started talking about violations and I started putting things on record.

Participants filed complaints both within the university and with outside agencies. A couple of participants filed more than one complaint. Some participants hired attorneys and prepared to take legal action against their universities. One proceeded with a lawsuit even after his adviser and department chair met with him privately to tell him that, if he were to pursue litigation, they would not be able to support him in writing letters of recommendation. He felt strongly that in his situation, the university violated both the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

— Reconstructing Committees

Similar to the switching-advisers theme, but more direct in that it involved being more transparent about the source of their dissatisfaction, a few of the participants had to remove faculty members from their dissertation committees. They felt that their relationship with committee members was unhealthy and that those members made it impossible for them to progress through the dissertation process. The unhealthy relationships with their committee members contributed to the racial trauma they experienced. One Latina participant discussed how her relationship with her committee chair reached a breaking point when her chair told the department head that she was not going to graduate.

It wasn't easy . . . It almost feels like you're getting a divorce . . . You try to make it work. You try to make it work because you made this commitment. So, I tried different things. I tried to tell her what I needed . . . I just felt like it's not working . . . When I finally made the decision to switch was when I found out she was saying things about me and our relationship to other people, specifically to the

director of the program, without first coming to me . . . I guess she told the director, "I don't think she's going to graduate."

This participant decided to dissolve her relationship with her committee chair by telling her that it just was not working out and that she needed to find another member for her committee. In the end, her decision to replace two committee members resulted in a stronger and more supportive team.

## Discussion

At least four major conclusions can be drawn from the preceding analysis. First, doctoral students of color appear to draw on a distinct repertoire of strategies for coping with racial trauma in the context of doctoral programs, and this inquiry contributes to existing literature by delineating some of the specific coping methods included in this repertoire, as presented by our participants. Indeed, while several coping strategy frameworks existed prior to this study (e.g., Brondolo et al., 2009; Danoff-Burg et al., 2004; Mellor, 2004; Sanders Thompson, 2006; Shorter-Gooden, 2004), the taxonomy emerging from this analysis is the first to illuminate how a diverse group of people of color cope with racism and racial trauma in the specific context of doctoral programs. In particular, the findings from this study suggest that doctoral students of color have a much more extensive set of responses to ensure their well-being than those represented in Mellor's (2004) taxonomy. Notably, doctoral students of color in this study did not resort to verbal or physical violence in responding to racism, as Mellor's model indicated they might. Rather, their direct responses were problem-focused.

Second, the findings of the current study not only reinforce how situational factors can play an important role in individuals' responses to racism and racial trauma (Branscombe et al., 1999; Brondolo et al., 2009; Bynum et al., 2007; Carter, 2007; Cheng, 2003; Harrell, 2000), but also add to the literature by shedding light on how context matters for doctoral students coping with such challenges. Findings from this study are consistent with a previous finding that doctoral students of color use academic achievement as a coping mechanism for racial trauma. Hurtado (1994) hypothesized that this was the case when the results of her study showed an unexpected relationship that indicated that students who reported experiencing more negative campus racial climates also reported higher academic self-concept. Indeed, contextual factors, such as relationships with advisers and dissertation chairs or power dynamics among instructors and students in the classroom, can have a profound impact on how doctoral students of color evaluate and respond to experienced racism and racial trauma. In many instances, participants were conscious of the political context of their situations and strategized plans for coping with the racism and racial trauma that they experienced while attempting to maintain positive relationships with their faculty advisers. Thus, the rela-

tionships with their faculty advisers and professors complicated the situations they had to navigate. It is critical that research on coping with racism and racial trauma take such context into account.

Third, it is clear that doctoral students of color may employ a wide array of coping strategies in response to experienced racial trauma that depend on their identities and the context in which the trauma occurs. To date, there has been little exploration of how doctoral students of color cope with racism and racial trauma. Prior to this analysis, Gildersleeve and colleagues (2011) and Gonzalez (2006) conducted the only empirical studies that explicitly focus on how doctoral students of color cope with racism, but those analyses are limited to the experiences of Black and Latino doctoral students and Chicana doctoral students, respectively. The current examination builds on that collective inquiry and represents the first study that outlines how doctoral students of color from various academic disciplines and a diverse array of racial, ethnic, gender, and age groups cope with racism and racial trauma in postsecondary institutional contexts.

Finally, it is important to highlight that, unlike Mellor's (2004) framework, our emergent taxonomy of coping responses among doctoral students of color does not include responses that are characterized by defeatist attitudes (e.g., rejecting one's racial identity). Some participants in the study internalized the negative messages that they received about being inadequate and unqualified or accepted that they were troublemakers as others suggested. We categorized these negative feelings as symptoms of racial trauma rather than responses to it. Our categorization is aligned with other psychologists who list feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blaming as symptoms of racial trauma rather than responses (e.g., Bryant-Davis, 2007; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009).

### Implications for Research and Practice

The findings from this study have several important implications for those who are committed to creating supportive environments for doctoral study. With regard to research, our findings confirm results from previous studies that indicate that students who have practice with responding to racism through the racial socialization they receive from family members are better prepared to respond to racism and employ sophisticated strategies (Stevenson, 2003). Researchers should delve into this topic by examining how contextual factors and the role of racial socialization in contributing to racial identity development shape the choice of strategies doctoral students of color use to cope with and respond to racism and racial trauma.

Second, as stated previously, one major limitation of this study is that it does not include the experiences of international students of color. Several participants discussed how international students of color were exploited or



targeted for dismissal from their programs. Findings from Cantwell and Lee (2010) show that international postdoctoral fellows regularly experience racism. Future studies should examine the experiences of international doctoral students of color with racism, racial trauma, and coping, particularly as they may have limited options for responding to racism due to visa issues and the threat of deportation. Including this population may offer new insights into how these students experience racial trauma as well as provide additional strategies for responding to racism.

Our first recommendation for practice is focused on the role of institutions' counseling and psychological services (CAPS), which offer counseling services, psychological testing, workshops, and crisis intervention. While one-third of participants sought treatment, five of the participants were unaware that their universities provided counseling services, were distrustful of university counseling, or reported negative interactions with CAPS staff. It is important for CAPS to conduct extensive outreach and provide targeted programming to support doctoral students of color. CAPS representatives should make appearances at graduate student orientations, activity fairs, and other events to provide information about the services they offer. They should also connect with students-of-color organizations, e-mailing information to their listservs and asking for time during their meetings to provide a brief introduction to CAPS. It is critical for CAPS to provide programming by a health professional trained to counsel students through experiences with racial trauma. Moreover, where counselors of color are not present or underrepresented on campus, CAPS should intentionally hire and train counselors who understand the racialized experiences of doctoral students of color so that they will not further contribute to the racial trauma these students experience. Two participants reported negative experiences with CAPS counselors who did not understand their needs or experiences as doctoral students of color; furthermore, counselors at one of the institutions violated HIPPA and FERPA laws.

Finally, doctoral students of color need greater support within their doctoral programs to navigate and negotiate racist situations. Many participants were forced to seek support outside of their departments because no mechanisms existed within their programs. They reported that they had nonexistent or negative relationships with their advisers, which led them to switch advisers or restructure their dissertation committees. In instances in which the participants switched advisers, they had to attribute this choice to reasons other than racism. Therefore, administrators should make available an anonymous grievance system in which students can report their racialized experiences. Faculty and administrators should also take these complaints seriously, whether they are filed directly through various offices around campus or through the indirect grievance system.

Both academic administrators and faculty should resolve these issues and work toward creating an inclusive departmental racial climate. Academic administrators and faculty should create opportunities to discuss and create

an awareness of the power dynamics that exist in the relationships between faculty and doctoral students of color, as well as how they can build cohesive and trusting relationships that communicate with those students about their experiences. Academic administrators and faculty could also create and participate in professional development activities to gain knowledge about how to facilitate discussions related to race as well as infuse culturally relevant topics into their curricula. In addition, faculty members could support the work of doctoral students of color by providing them with constructive feedback, guidance about research, and teaching opportunities. Participants reported that these opportunities were often given to their White peers while doctoral students of color were neglected. Finally, academic departments that serve doctoral students of color should prioritize and invest financially in recruiting faculty of color who have a record of mentoring and supporting doctoral students of color.

The initial impetus for conducting this study was our interest in understanding how doctoral students of color deal with the racism that they might encounter in doctoral studies. While many current and prospective doctoral students of color may already be familiar with some of the responses in the proposed inventory, as they may have developed techniques for navigating racist situations throughout their lives and developed sophisticated meta-analytical coping styles over time and with experience (Cheng, 2003; Stevenson, 2003), empirical research can help these students understand other ways that they can cope with racism and racial trauma in doctoral study, as well as help educators understand how they can facilitate the use of such coping strategies. Thus, the strategies disclosed in this inquiry constitute potential resources for doctoral students of color who might face situations similar to those of the twenty-six participants in this study and for college faculty and staff who work with those students.

The conditions and environments within which many doctoral students of color currently engage can be extremely hostile and toxic. However, we hope that the insights we offer into the experiences of doctoral students of color with racism and racial trauma and the implications we outline for practice will help institutions take action and truly support and maximize both the well-being and success of graduate doctoral students of color.

## Note

1. We use *inventory* and *taxonomy* interchangeably throughout.

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