



BYU Students' Experiences with the African American Civil Rights Seminar



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INTRODUCTION

In the most recent demographic breakdown released by Brigham Young University (BYU), Caucasian students make up 81% of the campus population. Black students make up just 1% of the 33,511 students attending BYU (*Facts & Figures*). Historical and societal factors impact Black student's experience while attending predominantly white schools such as BYU. In addition, BYU is sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, a religious institution which restricted the priesthood from Black people until 1978. In combination, these factors have an impact on the overall experience of a Black student on campus. The BYU Civil Rights Seminar (CRS) was created in 2012 to help provide students of color, particularly those with African ancestry, with community and support. The stated outcomes of the CRS are to improve these conditions by helping students 1) examine personal and communal well-being as it relates to their racial identity and 2) helping them recognize the possible impact of their racial identity as it relates to obtaining what they need personally and from their community. No formal research has been conducted to determine whether the BYU CRS accomplishes its stated outcomes. This phenomenological research has the potential to help us better understand the experiences of BYU students that have attended the CRS, especially regarding their sense of well-being and justice on campus.

METHODS

PROCEDURES

- Interviewers contacted 91 eligible CRS participants via email, phone and social media platforms to request their inclusion in the study.
- 71 participants signed audio/video recording and informed consent statements.
- The former CRS participants who responded participated in a 30 minute to 1- hour virtual interview with one of the research assistants that was recorded using Zoom recording feature and transcribed using Otter AI. During the interview, participants were asked questions regarding their experiences with race, their BYU experience prior to and post-seminar attendance, their experience on the seminar, if they feel like BYU meets their needs, and how this relates to their past and current sense of well-being.
- Each participant was assigned a number as to protect their individual identity.
- The study used stratified random sampling in attempt to maintain sample ratios that reflect CRS participation with respect to race and gender. A random number generator was used to select 24 participants whose interviews would be analyzed for the study.
- Interviewers read over each of the 24 transcripts for written errors and corrected them.

ANALYSIS

- Interviewers used In Vivo and Emotional approaches to code the terms and themes that were most prevalently found throughout the interview transcripts. Marks (2015) outlined a strategy to apply that coding technique.

RESULTS

Our research has not concluded, but significant trends have started to emerge. Reported below are concepts outlined in Isaac Prilleltensky's *Wellness as Fairness* (2012), a paper arguing that distinct conditions of justice lead to wellness outcomes, as well as examples found in the transcripts that align with these themes.

INDICATOR OF WELL-BEING	QUOTE
Organizational	"I didn't know of any Black therapists, which I think would be important. Just because [...] they would have a better understanding of how your life is, in some aspects [...] I mean, for me, and I'm, I'm not afraid to talk about it but as I think, <i>I would have benefited from having a Black therapist on on a White campus.</i> " – Participant 29
Communal	"I wish I could have had those little bubbles of safe, those <i>safety pockets</i> that I had from [...] the seminar [while at BYU]." – Participant 89
Interpersonal	"That was the first class I've ever been with so many black people, that, in a small group [...] And it was like, honestly, the first time I met other black students where we talked about [...] having the same struggle of being a minority on campus and how, when people would treat us very similarly. <i>And so it made me feel seen and heard.</i> " – Participant 58
Personal	"I feel like (the seminar) truly, like helped me understand not only who I was, but like <i>my place in the world, and how to better navigate as well.</i> " – Participant 59

**Italics added for emphasis*

REFERENCES

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Marks, L. (2015). A pragmatic, step-by-step guide for qualitative methods: Capturing the disaster and long-term recovery stories of Katrina and Rita. *Curr Psychol*, 34, 494-505. doi: 10.1007/s12144-015-9342-x

Prilleltensky, I. (2012). Wellness as fairness. *Am J Community Psychol*, 49, 1-21. doi: 10.1007/s10464-011-9448-8

PARTICIPANTS

- 24 participants were included in the analysis.
- 14 female and 10 male participants.
- 16 participants identified as Black to some degree, 5 participants identified as Caucasian, and 3 participants identified as other.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study is to assess whether the stated outcomes are sufficient and to recognize other themes that require increased consideration in assessing future alterations of the seminar. Research continues, but thus far, trends have been discovered that align with the concepts mentioned in the literature. We hope to eventually recognize the most predominant themes that students are referring to in their interviews, as well as how many of those themes correlates or (do not correlate) with the research that we have been analyzing.

FURTHER RESEARCH

This research continues with the goal of fully analyzing the data to determine if the CRS does accomplish its established goals and the lasting impacts that it has on its participants. Similar research could be performed with the BYU Latino Civil Rights Seminar and other similar courses.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations for this study include time and resources, which were limited to the span of two semesters. Also, the amount of CRS participants interviewed was limited because of self-selection. This limited us from gathering all of the experiences, and rather collecting the experiences of those who were willing to share.

Disclaimer: the results of this research are not representative of the experiences of all Black students on BYU campus, but rather the select few who participated in the CRS.

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