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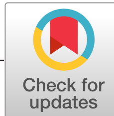

ARTICLE

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Sociolinguistic labor, linguistic climate, and race(ism) on campus: Black college students' experiences with language at predominantly white institutions

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Abstract

This project explores the sociolinguistic experiences of black American students in predominantly/historically white higher education settings. Through interviews with 30 black undergraduates at two different types of institutions, we show how language is a salient factor in racialization and racism on American college campuses. Both sets of students discussed stereotype threat (being at risk of negative stereotyping based on their language), as well as bifurcated sociolinguistic identities (an outcome of managing their linguistic resources to avoid negative stereotyping). We also find that the nuances of students' racialized experiences with language differ depending on other elements of campus climate: at the small private college, more students described tensions between black students, and stringent expectations for hyper-'academic' language. Student accounts reveal the *sociolinguistic labor* they perform in navigating campus environments rife with linguistic racism, showing that campus climate includes *linguistic climate*, undergirded by raciolinguistic ideologies.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The current study shows, through the personal accounts of black undergraduate students, some of the functions of language in racialization and racism in American higher education settings. Black

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students are underrepresented on most American college campuses, and research shows that racial discrimination, institutional policies, and professor and peer interactions all often negatively contribute to their academic progress and student well-being (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Much programming has intentionally sought to improve this situation: institutions have established 'diversity' and 'inclusion' initiatives, hired diversity officers, and added required diversity course requirements (Dunstan, Wolfram, Jaeger, & Crandall, 2015; Dunstan et al., 2018; Patton, 2016; Urciuoli, 2010; Williams, 2013). Yet, language variation has not been a primary point of focus in higher education work. Recent studies have found that dialect discrimination does impact college students (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2015, 2016); however, this work examined mostly white students speaking Southern English varieties. Moreover, research about racialized linguistic differences in education contexts has concentrated on primary and secondary schooling (e.g. Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2015, 2017; Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006; Reaser et al., 2017). We extend these two lines of research to explore how college students' linguistic experiences connect to their broader experiences of racialization (Alim, 2016). Additionally, we discuss the ways in which issues at the intersection of language and race affect the lived experiences and everyday labor of black students in historically white educational spaces.

2 | RESEARCH BACKGROUND

As work within educational Critical Race Theory (CRT) has shown, white supremacist patterns run through American educational systems (e.g. Harper et al., 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Patton, 2016; Patton, Harper, & Harris, 2015). This includes higher education, which is historically a predominantly white (Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen, & Milem, 1998; Linley, 2018; Patton, 2016; Patton et al., 2015) and socioeconomically privileged domain (Martin, 2012; Thelin & Gasman, 2011). While some black students attend Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs), established for black Americans (see, e.g. Gasman & Palmer, 2008), the majority attend predominantly or historically white institutions (PWIs/HWIs; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; see also Hurtado et al., 1998). 'Historically white' describes an institution that no longer has a majority white population; these institutions nonetheless originally served an entirely or mostly white student body (Gasman & Palmer, 2008).

Work in multiple disciplines documents black students' navigation of PWIs (see, e.g. Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Harper, 2013; Linley, 2018; McGee & Martin, 2011; Patton, 2006, 2016; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Strayhorn, 2014; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010; Taylor, 2015; Wallace & Bell, 1999). Harper (2013) summarizes this research as showing PWIs to be 'racially alienating and hostile spaces' (183). Black students (and other students of color) report experiencing tokenization, being burdened with educating peers and instructors about topics they are assumed to know about, and being pushed into a 'spokesperson' role for an entire population. Students of color in PWIs are also found to experience social exclusion, a lack of meaningful relationships with faculty (as well as a paucity of faculty of color), inadequate advising, and both institutional and interpersonal racism, including regularly occurring racial microaggressions, such as white students assuming their black peers only received entry to the college via affirmative action (Harper, 2013; Solórzano et al., 2000; inter alia).

Researchers have also examined the ways that students' self-conceptualization of their individual and racial group identity on campus play a role in their college experiences. According to Racial Socialization Theory (Anglin & Wade, 2007; Stevenson, 1995; Stevenson, Reed, & Bodison, 1996), students who have explicit awareness of societal oppression as well as exposure to positive messages

about black identity appear to be somewhat insulated from the negative effects of racism and discrimination on campus. Students with a positive and secure sense of their black identity as well as a perception of solidarity with other minoritized groups report better adjustment to college and higher rates of academic success (Anglin & Wade, 2007; Pope, 2000). However, students who strongly embrace an Afrocentric identity that excludes solidarity and does not allow for complete integration of a context-dependent racial identity report worse adjustment to college and lower academic achievement. In this way, students' racialized experiences on campus are influenced by the way they view their own positionality as members of black communities on and off campus as well as the nature of the experiences themselves; and we expect this to include their experiences with language.

Linguistic differences have received only passing attention in the higher education literature (see discussion below),[1] but ample sociolinguistic research addresses language at the K-12 levels, much of it focusing on the 'achievement gap' between black and white students (Alim, 2005; Craig, Thompson, Washington, & Potter, 2004; Delpit, 2006). American classrooms overwhelmingly insist on 'Standardized English"[2] as the sole mode of instruction and learning, creating a system of privilege that benefits those who enter school speaking it. For black students without Standardized English as part of their repertoire, negative consequences on student outcomes and self-esteem are well-documented (e.g. Craig et al., 2004; Delpit, 2006; Mills & Washington, 2015; Smitherman, 2015; Young, 2009). Schools are among the institutions that reproduce what Baker-Bell (2020) terms *anti-black linguistic racism*.

Most black college students are likely multidialectal, with repertoires that include African American Language[3] (AAL; Green, 2002; Lanehart, 2015), though this is of course not always the case, and our study did not assume that students spoke AAL. Educational research has found that in the United States, multidialectal students at all levels are expected to contextually move between linguistic varieties, especially AAL and Standardized English (Baker-Bell, 2020). Mills and Washington (2015), Baker-Bell (2020), as well as the participants in the current study, frequently refer to the phenomenon of moving between such racialized language varieties as 'code-switching".[4] Expectations for code-switching in the United States relate to larger cultural ideas speakers and listeners have about how language does and should operate in society, hereafter referred to as *language ideologies*, defined by Gal and Irvine (2000) as 'the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them' (35). Code-switching is central in the prevailing approach to dialect differences in K-12 schooling, yet this research tends not to specifically address the role of ideologies on the parts of the speakers themselves nor in the wider society. Baker-Bell (2020) and Young (2009) argue that focusing on code-switching reproduces white supremacist language ideologies; nonetheless, by the time students reach college, it is assumed that they have acquired Standardized English and are comfortable speaking and writing in it, regardless of their attitudinal orientations toward linguistic varieties.[5]

Yet, given the ongoing stigmatization of AAL, AAL-speaking college students may bring with them personal histories of linguistic insecurity (Rickford & Rickford, 2000) and even linguistic shame (Baker-Bell, 2020). Moreover, language is a component of widespread racial stereotypes, such that for black Americans, either speaking or not speaking AAL may be seen as 'marked'. Linguistic duality as an element of black students' experiences in PWIs has been briefly noted in some studies, such as Taylor's (2015) work with African American women freshmen at prestigious US universities. Taylor's participants, who were at PWIs, described what she calls a 'bicultural crisis' (104) upon entering the university, which was made worse by their bidialectalism. Similarly, in describing the experiences of black men in PWIs, Wallace and Bell (1999) note that language is one element of white culture in a PWI that black students may sometimes wish to 'escape' or 'take a break' from (Wallace & Bell, 1999:322).

This research prompts questions about whether and how linguistic differences might be a contributing factor to feelings of *minority stress* experienced by students of color in PWIs (see Linley, 2018; Smedley et al., 1993; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2000; Wei et al., 2010). Interestingly, students' *bicultural competence*, the ability to move between different cultural environments, is shown to mitigate minority stress (Wei et al., 2010), and scales used to measure bicultural competence includes questions about one's perceived ability to manage more than one language variety (David, Okazaki, & Saw, 2009:216). This suggests that for bidialectal minority students, code-switching can be key to successful navigation of PWI/HWIs. However, these negotiations of language are not likely to come without costs (Baker-Bell, 2020:30–31). For this reason, one concept we use to help capture students' felt experiences of bicultural competence is *sociolinguistic labor*: the physical, emotional, and psychological effort put into deploying sociolinguistic resources in a way that is meant to satisfy others.[6] This term is on par with *emotional labor*, initially used to describe service agents' display of expected emotions during encounters with customers (Hochschild, 1983), and one of the increased burdens of performance required of those with marginalized identities in 'professional' workplaces (Durr & Harvey Wingfield, 2011; Harlow, 2003).

A second question is the role of language in *campus climate*, identified as an important factor in minority college student success (Hurtado et al., 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000). Campus climate has been theorized to include a set of institution-external and institution-internal forces (Hurtado et al., 1998). Externally, these include government policies and sociohistorical forces. Internally, they include the institution's racial history, the diversity of its campus makeup, and the psychological and behavioral dimensions of intergroup coexistence. Externally, language ideologies are a sociohistorical force; academic settings reproduce standard language ideologies that privilege both whiteness and economic status (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2012). University faculty in particular play key roles in reproducing these ideologies, as both 'language workers' (Urciuoli & LaDousa, 2013) and 'language authorities' (Milroy & Milroy, 1999). Internally, languages and dialects are elements of structural diversity on campus, and language can contribute to the psychological and behavioral dimensions of climate, including minority stress and racial socialization. We use the term *linguistic climate* to encompass the everyday manifestations of both language use and language ideology in the campus environment.

A hostile or unequal linguistic climate may present a countervailing force to 'diversity' efforts for students from a variety of backgrounds—and especially those with multiply marginalized identities. Dunstan and Jaeger (2015, 2016) found that students with native Appalachian English (AppE) dialects felt less comfortable in class and felt like they needed to work harder to prove their intelligence. These (nearly all white) students cite language as an important part of their identity, yet despite university efforts to promote 'inclusion' on campus, they feel a strong need to assimilate linguistically. Smitherman (2006) has described a similar ambivalence among AAL speakers as a 'linguistic push-pull'; importantly, it is uniquely black students who face anti-black racism, on top of whatever other prejudices operate on campus (see Baker-Bell, 2020). Ultimately, this work reiterates the need to incorporate language into efforts around campus diversity and campus climate (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz, 2019; Dunstan & Jaeger, 2015).

3 | METHODS

This exploratory study includes 30 approximately hour-long interviews with self-identified black/African American undergraduate students at two different institutions. Interview questions prompted students to describe how they construe their linguistic practices as related to their racial identity, primarily focusing on the institutional environment. We consider participants'[7] accounts to be a form

of 'counterstorytelling', eliciting the experiential knowledge that is central to CRT-informed approaches (Baker-Bell, 2020; Charity Hudley et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings 1998; Patton, 2016; Patton et al., 2015; Solórzano et al., 2000).

3.1 | Study sites

We solicited participation from two different kinds of institutions, to compare students with potentially differing collegiate experiences. The sites were a large, public, selective, 'Research 1' university in the Midwest (which we call Big Land Grant University [BLGU][8]); and a small, private, highly selective, liberal arts college on the West Coast (Small Western College [SWC]). Both institutions were originally designed for white students, and both still have a plurality of white students, though the demographics of the institutions differ in important ways, discussed in turn. These institutions provided a convenience sample for us, but we also intentionally included each to represent different models of higher education, as well as different institutional strategies for managing diverse student bodies. In the United States, small, private, selective liberal arts schools like SWC are primarily residential, and they typically do not offer programs for graduate students. They frequently advertise their small class sizes and close relationships between students and faculty, as well as opportunities for undergraduate research and related experiences (Umbach & Kuh, 2006). In contrast, large public universities such as BLGU have a more varied student body in terms of age, and generally have a significant proportion of graduate students. Their classes may be larger and offer fewer opportunities for close faculty–student contact, but they tend to have a significantly lower cost of attendance and offer a greater variety of academic programs (ibid).

BLGU had a 2018 enrollment of over 68,000 students across six campuses, making it one of the largest institutions in the United States (BLGU Enrollment Services, 2018). Annual cost of attendance including room and board is ~$23,000 for in-state students and ~$45,000 for out-of-state students. For all students, 66.3% came from within the state, while 9.9% were international; 6.35% of students identified as African American, while 3.58% identified as two or more races. The proportion of African American students is about half that of the black population of its state (United States Census Bureau, 2019). In total, according to 2018 statistics, the campus population was about 21% minority students.

SWC had 1,703 students in 2018, an 8:1 student to faculty ratio, and a total cost of attendance of ~$70,000 per year. A 2016 study by Money.com and Essence.com cited SWC among the top 40 best schools nationwide for minority students, citing its 92% African American graduation rate, high salaries among graduates, commitment to diversity among faculty and students, and high degree of affordability due to a commitment to strong financial aid (Clark). In academic year 2018–2019, SWC reported that 9% of its students identified as African American, and another 7% as two or more races (ibid). The college also has substantial Hispanic/Latino and Asian representation, and non-international white students compose only 35% of the total student body. As a result, and in contrast to BLGU, SWC is no longer a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) but rather now a Historically White Institution (HWI).

Both BLGU and SWC have public and well-publicized 'diversity' initiatives to improve campus climate and support students of color. For instance, one pillar of BLGU's current 'Strategic Plan' espouses a commitment to 'inclusive access', 'economic diversity', and improving retention and performance among 'underrepresented populations' (BLGU Office of the President, 2018). SWC has been very outspoken about its commitment to diversity and social justice both on campus and in the community, evident in a number of initiatives that the college features on its website and public materials (Diversity at SWC, 2019). Both schools also have people of color in top positions of institutional leadership. These facts reflect priorities that may theoretically improve experiences and outcomes for students of color, and it is the case that this is one stated aim of such initiatives.

3.2 | Participant recruitment

We recruited students at each site to participate in 1-hr interviews in spring 2018 at BLGU and in fall 2018 at SWC. Students were recruited via emails to student organizations and campus diversity officers, as well as through the researchers' student contacts and on-campus flyers. Participants each received a $15 Amazon gift card as compensation. Students must have been over 18 years old and currently enrolled as undergraduates at one of the institutions of interest at the time of the interview, and they had to self-identify as black or African American (though this could also include self-identifying as black and another race). We do not claim that the student sample is necessarily representative of the entire student bodies at each institution, though they do contain a diverse set of black students from different locations, academic majors, and campus positions, despite the small sample size.

3.3 | Participant sample

We analyzed interviews from 14 BLGU students and 16 SWC students. In total, the first author (Holliday) conducted 14 of the interviews and the second author (Squires) 16; each of us conducted interviews on both campuses. Our sample is slightly skewed towards female-identifying participants (19). In both samples, there was variation in students' self-described use of different English varieties and in self-described social class, which contributed to students' particular experiences, as discussed where relevant below. While our interview protocol asked in-depth questions about students' identities and campus experiences, a full ethnographic description of both the individual students and the campus contexts is beyond the scope of the current study. We acknowledge that multifaceted aspects of participant identities, which our methods are unable to fully capture, also influence their linguistic experiences, especially with respect to region and class. As Lo (2020) discusses, conceptualizations of 'language and race' without a broader contextualization of other factors, sometimes fail to present the entire sociolinguistic picture, which represents a limitation for the field. However, as the current study is among the first to specifically address racialized linguistic experiences on campus, we hope it acts as a starting point for further research that explores these complex intersections.

Before proceeding, we note our own positionalities. The first author (Holliday) is a biracial black woman and, at the time of this study, a professor at a school similar to SWC. She was also once an undergraduate student at BLGU, so her approach is informed by both personal experience as a student of color there, and several years of pedagogical experience. The second author (Squires) is a white woman and professor at a school similar to BLGU. Her approach to this research is informed by 15 years of predominantly undergraduate teaching experiences at four public PWIs. As is clear, we each come to this work from different racial positions and different campus experiences, and this undoubtedly impacted participants' interactions with us and our interpretations of the material (Charity Hudley et al., 2019; Patton et al., 2015).

3.4 | Interviews and analysis

Following consent and a set of basic personal background questions, our interview script included 20 open-ended questions organized into four sections, listed below with one sample question from each section:

a. Linguistic background. *How do you consider the types of language you use to be related to your racial identity?*

b. Language use in the classroom. *How do you think code-switching relates to what goes on in the classroom?*
c. Language use outside of the classroom. *Can you describe how your language use plays out on campus in ways other than coursework?*
d. Strategies for navigating the university. *If an incoming black student were to ask you for advice on successfully navigating BLGU/SWC, what would you tell them?*

We avoided asking directly whether participants spoke specific language varieties or dialects because we are interested in language ideologies and we wanted to allow students to construe their linguistic repertoires (Gumperz, 1971[1968]) in their own terms. We also avoided using variety-naming terms until they had been referenced by the interviewee. We did ask directly about code-switching, first by asking if participants had heard of that term and if so, what it meant to them. Nearly all participants had heard of the term and used it themselves, and those who did not explicitly use the term, still indicated that they were familiar with the concept. Since 'code-switching', with the meaning of moving between AAL and Standardized English, is widely used in public discussions about language and race, we formulated the question in this way to uncover participants' level of racialized metalinguistic awareness. Some questions did not directly ask about language, and follow-ups from the interviewers probed where language fit into what students described. Because the interview protocol was not strict, both participants and researchers were free to follow up on particular comments.

Below, we present three overarching themes that emerged across participant responses. These themes were generated from a qualitative content analysis process. Throughout data collection, the two researchers compared interview notes after each round of interviews, discussing commonalities and differences in participant responses. This constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) enabled us to develop a set of 13 response components that three research assistants later coded each transcription for. Some of these used closed coding categories (e.g. 'Personal use of AAL') but most were open ('Effort with regard to language'); research assistants entered relevant responses into a spreadsheet along with time stamps for when those responses occurred.

It is important to note that student experiences were not monolithic, and students themselves often pointed out that 'all black people aren't the same', as one (BLGU woman) said. What we present below certainly does not represent all black students at all H/PWIs, and one short article (indeed, one analysis) cannot do justice to the richness of stories we were told. We also do not make claims that the small sample of students interviewed is necessarily representative of all black students on these campuses. Nonetheless, the three themes we discuss below were a consistent presence across interviews and emerged across different interview questions.

4 | FINDINGS

4.1 | Linguistic stereotypes and stereotype threat

In students' narratives, the most consistent theme across both populations was the experience of stereotype threat, especially in academically focused settings, but also in dormitories, dining halls, and elsewhere on campus. Stereotype threat is a well-studied psychological phenomenon that has been shown to affect minority student well-being and achievement (Aronson et al., 2002), and to negatively impact black students specifically (Solórzano et al., 2000). The pervasiveness of stereotype threat reported among our participants is neither novel nor surprising; our work specifies the role of language.

Our participants saw language as a cue to the negative stereotypes about black Americans they were subjected to on campus and elsewhere (e.g. Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Baker-Bell, 2020; Rickford & King, 2016). Among the non-referential functions of language is its perception and use as an *index*—a linguistic form that 'points to' a social property (Silverstein, 2003). It is this indexical function students pointed to when they described language as a signal to blackness in general, as well as to specific stereotypes of black people. Manipulating language was also seen, though, as a primary means of combating stereotype threat. Participants' anxieties about confirming racial stereotypes were central in their responses across the questions we asked—none of which invoked the term 'stereotype' directly—so it was often through the frame of stereotypic personae that students could describe how language played a part in their experience of racialization on campus. Moreover, students rarely used the direct terms 'racism' or 'racist'; negative black stereotypes seem to provide a heuristic through which these students understand racist experiences.

Students mentioned being conscious of the possibility that they might be one of the few black people some of their white classmates had ever interacted with, and worrying that how they speak could trigger negative stereotypes. One stereotype mentioned is the perception of black people as dangerous, as in (1):

1

Holliday: Do you think there's anything the students could do to make [classrooms] more comfortable?
Participant: Mmm. Talk to us I guess? I dunno, I feel like sometimes they [white students] may be scared to like, have an interaction because of the media or like the way- or if they had like a bad interaction for example with a black student or with black people in general. Then they may think that we're like scary or stuff like that? (BLGU woman)

Many students brought up a stereotype linking blackness to lack of intelligence and academic deficiency (see Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Rickford & King, 2016). In characterizing the risk of linguistically triggering this stereotype, participants referred to a 'stupid black kid', 'dumb black kid', and 'ignorant black girl' trope (cf. Solórzano et al., 2000). While most students noted that this anxiety was centered on how their peers perceive them, instructors' perceptions were also of concern—especially among BLGU students. In narrating the ways they are stereotyped, some students raised intersections of social class and gender with their racial identities. In (2) below, an SWC participant who self-identified as coming from a lower socioeconomic background drew a contrast between herself and black students from higher-status backgrounds, and noted this as a factor in her stress about not being perceived as intelligent. Similarly, the SWC woman in (3) incorporates gender-based stereotypes in her ideas about who her classmates (and professors) tend to view as intelligent or not.

2

Participant: I know like I have a different experience from a black student who is from a middle-class family [laughs], um, but I think at least coming from somebody who's like from a low-class background…
Squires: Mmm.

P: I mean or a low-income background, um that it's- it's like this, yeah, this like this constant fear of um, like, I don't want to sound an- uneducated-
S: Yeah.
P: Um I wanna present myself in a way where you know I- I sound like I know what I'm talking about. Because I- you know in a way, I d- I do- I **do** know what I'm talking about.
S: Right. [laughs]
P: Um.
S: Right.
P: But yeah, I think that white students don't really have that fear.
S: Mmm-hmm.
P: In a way especially in this setting, 'cause a lot of them not only are white, but also are um upper-middle-class. (SWC woman)

3

Participant: I think because, especially not only just being black but as a black **woman**, I'm not seen as like, smart stereotypically. The stereotypically smart person is a white man or a Asian man, a south Asian woman or something like that.
Squires: Mmm.
P: Um. I always have it in my head as like the- the professor would ask a question and I have to think before I raise my hand, 'cause I don't wanna sound like that dumb black girl or that dumb black kid. I don't wanna say something wrong, or you mess up and like get too comfortable using slang and people don't know what I mean, *Ope, now I'm ghetto*. And it's like, you always have that in the back of your head. … (SWC woman)

Note this participant's use of the term ‘ghetto’ in reference to language that could index a type of blackness associated with lower social status (which she calls ‘slang’), and her connection between being a black woman and having to be more careful about her language or else risk the application of a negative, race- and class-based stereotype (cf. Brown, 2006). A related stereotype was that of being ‘loud’, ‘angry’, or ‘aggressive’; this was mentioned predominantly by our female-identifying participants, three of whom made reference to a precise ‘angry black woman’ or ‘angry black girl’ trope:

4

Participant: Like I never wanna be seen as like the angry black woman or the black woman that gets upset. So therefore if I'm upset at a student during a group project, I would not be like, *Damn, like, get it together*, you know as I would with like people of color. I'd be like, *Okay well, Sam or Emma*, do you guys think that this, like this is a better way of doing it? You know like just approaching in a more gentle manner so I don't fit the stereotypes. (SWC woman)

As she narrated the vignette—a response to a question about code-switching in the classroom—this participant performed the contrast between how she would speak with students of color versus

white students. She embodied the contrast through her prosody, switching to a higher pitch range in her performance of white-directed speech but also employed a filler 'like' and framed the white-directed utterance as a question rather than a direct command. The implication is that using AAL—or more broadly, features racialized as non-white—would be perceived as 'angry' by her white classmates, therefore she adopts what she imagines will be perceived as a 'gentler' way of speaking.

These students discussed actively working to avoid language they viewed as most indexical of negative stereotypes, though they generally did not pinpoint specific linguistic features (this reflects the fact that American education tends not to equip students with metalanguage for describing language structure or language variety; see Baker-Bell, 2020). For those with AAL in their linguistic repertoire, they noted a blanket avoidance in academic settings of whatever they call this variety: 'slang', 'AAVE', 'Ebonics', 'African American English'; 'the vernacular'; or using 'improper' language.[9] Participants also noted certain linguistic attributes that were not variety-specific but which are nonetheless ideologized as black or triggering of negative black stereotypes: volume, avoiding sounding 'loud'; tone, avoiding sounding 'angry'; and quantity, avoiding talking 'too much'. While linguists may not necessarily categorize the features that signal these characteristics as part of AAL, our participants experience them as racialized.

When needing to mitigate the risk of racially marked language, students described a 'target' style as speaking/sounding 'proper' or 'correct'; using 'standard', 'professional', or 'academic' language; and talking in ways associated with being/seeming 'white'. Most participants used the concept of code-switching to describe this behavior, as at the end of excerpt (5) below.

5

Participant: Maybe this is an issue with myself - I don't know if other black students experience - but feeling like you have to be twice as good to get as half of what they get, so there's that cliché term, but that's very real, like you have to be better than everybody else in order to just be seen. Um, so I think that's definitely something, um. But also like, just having to think about that - I don't think white students have to think about um, does my race play a factor in how I'm perceived in classrooms?

Holliday: Mm.

P: Um, or how intelligent people think I am, or what they think I'm capable of.

H: Yeah. Do- do you think like your language factors into that too?

P: Yes, definitely - so like when I'm speaking in vernacular, or um, improper English, they'll- they think that you're not as smart, or you aren't capable, um, when that's not tr- [laughs] true at all. I would say it'd make you more capable, because you're able to [laughs] switch between languages. (BLGU man)

This student resists the idea that 'vernacular' speakers are not as intelligent as those speaking standardized English—a 'counterstory' that challenges the hegemonic ideology (Baker-Bell, 2020). For him and others, activating the possibilities of their linguistic repertoires was a means of *stereotype management*, which McGee and Martin (2011:1354) call 'a tactical response to the ongoing presence of stereotype threat'. McGee and Martin note that constant management takes a psychological toll on students, even while leading to successful academic outcomes. Indeed, our participants described code-switching to be both active and tiring *work*—what we are calling *sociolinguistic labor*. This labor is a response to the linguistic climate; students perform it to prevent activating negative black stereotypes but it is also for the comfort and ultimate benefit of their white peers (and instructors).

4.2 | Bifurcated sociolinguistic identities

The second theme is students' reporting of a bifurcation of their identities: not only maintaining separate codes that were necessary for existing in both academic and social spaces on campus but also maintaining separate identities corresponding to these different codes. A number of works by black scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois have long discussed this phenomenon, which Du Bois called a sort of 'double consciousness'. According to Du Bois (1989[1903]), having separate identities and corresponding social practices was a necessary survival skill for American blacks, resulting from their unique social position requiring them to inhabit different economic and social worlds. This duality of identity and its performance has also been noted in the research about black students at PWIs (McGee & Martin, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2000) and about code-switching itself (Baker-Bell, 2020).

The majority of the students in our study referenced these types of feelings, even sometimes specifically invoking black scholarly arguments to do so. In the following indicative excerpt from a SWC student, recalling a lunch he attended sponsored by the Office of Black Student affairs (OBSA), the student finds it laborious to maintain these separate identities and feels more comfortable in spaces where he feels that he can speak authentically, without having to figuratively 'wear the mask'.

6

Participant: And I sat at a table with like stu- a few students…and like we were able to have a conversation. Like I was with my **family** [laughs], like it like, you know all of us were like, felt comfortable. We were able to say things that like if said outside, outside of that room people would've been like *Wait really you say that*? kind of thing and it was just- I- I really definitely enjoyed that experience. It was really good for me to be able to like s- take a step back and finally just like you know and like, figuratively take the mask off for a second.

Squires: Yeah. Yeah so. I mean, how important is it to have those kinds of environments where you can just… **talk**?

P: Uh I really enjoy it. I feel like especially after a hard day, you know where you're like um- my Fridays, I'm in class from eight until five like with no, my only break is lunch.

S: Yeah

P: So the- especially those days it's just like I'm too tired to try to like you know, **appease you** right now. (SWC man)

In the narrative above, the SWC student references 'taking off the mask', which also comes from a black scholarly tradition (Fanon, 1970), though it was not clear whether or not the student was referencing Fanon 1970. Other students also referred to a 'mask' or a 'façade', in describing these sociolinguistic performances.

Students were explicit about the differences between situations in which they were linguistically comfortable and those where they were not. In the following narrative, a participant relays the fact that her choice of language is not simply a matter of the classroom versus social situations, but that other aspects of the setting and the interlocutors matter as well, including the racial identities of those involved.

7

Participant: Well, I took a black cla-- oh so we call them black classes. [laughs] So it's like African-American studies classes.

Squires: Yeah, yeah.

P: For short you're just like, *Oh yeah I took a black class.*

S: Yeah.

P: Um, in black classes, you can chill! Your professor's probably black.

S: Yeah.

P: They probably talk pretty chill like you do. Of course when uh, of course they can code-switch ‘cause that's a thing that we do in the professional environment. But in your general class language, you can bring it down. [laughs] You can breathe more.

S: Yeah, yeah.

P: And of course, this is still a PWI. You can never be in a class that's exclusively black. That'd be really cool, um, but that's not gonna happen. Um, but we've gone– I’ve gone to at least over 50%, and that is a **game-changer**. Cause it's like, Hey, this is my classroom. [laughs] You in my classroom now. [laughs] We gon do what we do, and you gon– you gon enjoy the environment. (BLGU woman)

This student has positioned the classroom as an inherently ‘professional’ space where language is expected to be more standardized, but the demographics and settings of a particular class influence her level of comfort and indeed may shift the boundaries for which identities she is allowed to perform. In ‘black classes’, she feels more at ease to use language that feels more natural (‘chill’) to her, which includes AAL (as she demonstrates and embodies at the end of the excerpt).

This student presents ‘black classes’ as a kind of ‘counter-space’ (Patton, 2006; Solórzano et al., 2000), as was the Office of Black Student Affairs (OBSA) lunch described above. Not having to perform the sociolinguistic labor of code-switching or other self-monitoring was one factor students mentioned to increase their comfort in different settings. In counter-spaces, black identities are welcomed, and students generally saw this to extend to the kind of language deemed acceptable there. Multiple SWC students mentioned OBSA events; likewise, multiple students at BLGU noted the importance of the campus's black cultural center, black sororities and fraternities, and the Black Student Association and other student organizations. This confirms research by Patton (2006) and others on the importance of black cultural centers at PWIs—to have spaces where, as one BLGU woman said, black students can ‘be ourselves, to talk how we want to talk…just do anything that makes us feel like we're the **real**—I’m the real [name]’. Counter-spaces were mostly described as more socially oriented spaces on campus (though with some academic components), but the student above in (7) was not the only one to portray classrooms with more black students or black instructors as approaching counter-space status.

4.3 | Different campuses, different linguistic climates

For all students, the issue of what language to use and where was influenced by the context, other people's expectations, and who their interlocutors are. Yet, SWC students were more likely to mention an additional consideration: pressure to use an elevated ‘academic’ language. This extends beyond racial stereotype threat because the black students we interviewed had some consciousness that this pressure exists at SWC for white students as well. They describe the campus culture at SWC as being linguistically

competitive for everyone but also of one where they are constantly having to prove that they possess sufficient knowledge as well as in-group political credentials to be heard and/or taken seriously.

For BLGU students, the variety that could avoid racialized scrutiny was characterized as what linguists would call Standardized English—forms that are considered to be devoid of racial, regional, or social markings. For SWC students, by contrast, the target variety was even 'higher' in prestige and specifically marked to index intelligence. What they described—and sometimes performed to us—is something like Bucholtz' 'Superstandard English': the use of ''supercorrect' linguistic variables: lexical formality, carefully articulated phonological forms, and prescriptively standard grammar' (Bucholtz, 20001:88). Nearly every SWC student expressed some linguistic insecurity about speaking in a way that was marked as *academic*. We believe this insecurity stems from SWC's conscious framing of itself jointly as an extremely selective liberal arts campus, as well as politically very progressive, as we discuss below.

Six different SWC participants talked about both students and instructors using 'big' or 'large' words, as in (8):

8

Holliday: You think like [classroom] participation is different for black and white students?
Participant: Mm-hmm.
H: Like how?
P: 'Cause like white students will participate and probably be right half the time. Black person will participate and like be right, but will use different language- like sometimes my answer will literally be the same as another white person's, but they'll be like, *You're right*, and I'm like, Timmy said the same thing I said, like, but I just said like instead of saying oh, *Let's pursue further action*, I said, *Let's continue*. Like you know it's like, we get straight to the point I say, with our language, more- ours is very sharp, very direct, it's- at least for me, let's say it that way 'cause my parents, like everyone in my family, they're very sharp. We don't like beat around the bush with saying it. But then other people they'll like use all this big language. They u- like say, like, **thirty words** just to say the same thing I said in five words. (SWC man)

This student experiences whiteness as associated with the use of more words as compared to the language of black people ('our language'), which he views positively as more succinct and direct. Nonetheless, he perceives that white students' use of 'this big language' leads their contributions to be given more weight than those of black students.

A different SWC participant called the way professors spoke, and how other students emulated them, 'privilege intonation' and 'privilege inflection', which she associated with whiteness, white Californians' speech in particular, high social class standing, and academic discourse. These perceptions of the language being used around them by peers and professors—part of the linguistic climate—impact students' level of comfort in classroom situations as well as on the campus as a whole. Importantly, SWC students noted that the *racial* climate on campus is likely better at SWC than at many places, both because it is more diverse and because of the school's overtly progressive political orientation. Yet, we find that elements of the *linguistic* climate at SWC produced different anxiety for students, because of the strong associations between language itself and academic performance. Additionally, several SWC students expressed feeling stress related to campus-wide expectations about terminology when discussing social concepts like race and gender. One male student, calling

SWC a 'politically correct institution', noted that some of the expected terminology may exclude students without access to it prior to entering college (one example given was the term 'Latinx' instead of 'Latino/a'). In this way, the so-called 'politically correct' language was also seen as a kind of 'elevated language' that is not equally available to all speakers.

The specific ways in which language was used at each institution also seemed to reflect other social issues related to campus climate. The students at BLGU reported feeling more cohesion between black students such that the black community was felt to be a true community (though it is possible that given our recruitment methods, our sample is biased toward more campus-oriented students). At SWC, however, a number of students reported feeling like there were two separate groups of black students who did not necessarily experience camaraderie with one another, and who in some cases, made things more difficult for other students of color. This is likely attributable at least partially to the differences in recruiting strategies between the two schools, as well as the types of students who may be attracted to large state universities as opposed to small liberal arts schools. In particular, some black students at SWC, who had not previously attended predominantly white schools, felt that the more economically privileged black students looked down on them. In particular, they said that such black students may be especially likely to use inaccessible academic language in classroom spaces, thus creating an even more tense environment for black students who did not use such language. In this way, the more privileged black students also upheld the notion of academically elite language as a campus norm, but particularly as one that black students feel pressure to use to have their ideas taken seriously. One SWC participant reflected on the state of relationships between black students on campus:

9

Participant: I think there needs to be a team that's working to dismantle why there's such a divide in the black community here. There's such a divide between people who consider themselves 'niggas' and people who go to OBSA lunches. Because OBSA like has this specific of like, what a black student should be like and you- Like that's the message I got first year, you know? And I still went to OBSA lunch—mm um lunches and stuff like that, but I know a lot of my black friends who come from like the Southside Chicago, or wherever they come from. Like, they don't go to OBSA lunches for what? Like to chit chat with people who they don't even relate with? And so it's like, but if we want better parties on campus or more black community on campus and like a more safe space on campus… don't we need to just interact with each other on the basis that we have the same race and therefore we're all ostracized…but you hate other black people because they're rich and so is that because you're insecure about being poor? Or is that because you feel like you still can't relate to them? (SWC woman)

This student's comment again reflects the double-bind faced by black students, reiterating the experience of bifurcation we discussed above—here, juxtaposing students who attend events like school-sponsored lunches, and those who do not. Indeed, even black students who participate in organizations such as the aforementioned OBSA allude to the fact that they feel there is a certain ideology of what a 'good black student' looks like, and that they also struggle to achieve it. In contrast with the quote above from the BLGU student who discussed feeling more comfortable in 'black classes', SWC students may actually experience additional social pressure even in the presence of other black students, if those other students have linguistic privilege and a desire to conform to wider campus linguistic norms.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, our participants reported engaging in a high level of self-monitoring to manage the pressure of getting language 'right' in a variety of different social and academic situations. This leads to a sort of linguistic hyperawareness in which students experience constant pressure and threat of ostracization if they make a misstep by being the 'wrong' version of themselves, both socially and linguistically, in a given social situation. In their narratives about code-switching, students framed their linguistic moves as requiring mental and psychological effort and as feeling like a 'mask'. This work allows them to navigate the extra scrutiny they feel is attended to their self-presentation, including their language. Most of our participants frame this as being both tiring and unfair, as it is work that they do not see their white classmates needing to perform. Previous research on PWIs (Solórzano et al., 2000, among others) also shows students feeling 'drained' from constantly managing self-presentation; we reiterate that language—linguistic work—is a substantial part of this for most of our participants. These observations also reflect a broader body of sociolinguistic research on middle-class black speakers, which has described speakers feeling a need to code-switch in white spaces as a persistent challenge that reflects the burden that standard language ideology places on black speakers (Spears, 1988). In this way, the student experience is reflective of a larger societal issue: the basic sociolinguistic inequality experienced by black speakers who exist in an American society that was not linguistically or socially designed for them.

The sociolinguistic labor black college students are performing is a response to the linguistic climate they find themselves in. We found that different campus racial/ethnic compositions and orientations to 'diversity' contribute to very different campus climates, which in turn contribute to differing sociolinguistic pressures. The nuances of these student experiences are also related to students' previous social and linguistic contexts. In particular, at SWC, the divide between more economically privileged students who more easily access hyperstandard language and those who could not was a salient factor. This adds a valuable layer of complexity to discussions about campus 'diversity'; divides between black students because of other issues such as gender and especially class should be taken into consideration at both personal and policy levels as well.

These students are keenly aware of how intertwined perceptions of blackness are with perceptions of language, and their counterstories reiterate that the language ideologies operating on campus are not race-neutral—they are raciolinguistic ideologies. Participants critique the linguistic hegemony of academia when they note the unfairness of them having to code-switch when most of their white peers do not even have to think about language; and when they note that the norms of academic discourse, including what is considered the 'right' way to talk about social issues, may be exclusionary, in spite of their intent to function as indexical of an inclusive worldview.

We hope that future work will address more systematically the many issues that our methods could not. In particular, looking more deliberately at the intersections of racial identity and other identity categories such as class and gender should prove fruitful. Additionally, while our work identified participants via racial identification, it would also be useful to sample students who have varying access to AAL, as it is clear that experiences do differ for students depending on the makeup of their linguistic repertoires. Further, while we compared a predominantly white institution to a historically white one, it would be useful to compare the linguistic climate at majority-black institutions, for example, HBCUs.

We further hope that by documenting these students' experiences and raising their voices, we foreground the urgency of anti-racist policies and programs on campus. Practically, this work reaffirms that racism on campus (as elsewhere) must be understood to have a linguistic component, and that efforts at improving outcomes for minority students should include linguistic interventions—not in

students' own language, but in the linguistic expectations, biases, and norms that they are asked to navigate. At the end of our interviews, we asked what recommendations our participants would make to instructors and institutions. Students mentioned that it could help if instructors and their fellow students were more educated about language differences, linguistic prejudice, and managing diverse classrooms (cf Dunstan et al., 2018). Some mentioned rethinking how 'participation' is used in grading, and taking steps to not penalize students who may be less apt to participate—as this reticence is sometimes a response to (linguistic) racism. Some noted that instructors could be more self-aware of their own language, to try to be 'linguistically accessible' (i.e. not needlessly 'academic'), to not assume that all students share the same definitions of key concepts, and to be willing to intervene when white students say something racist. At the institutional level, participants emphasized the need to increase numbers of black students, increase student retention, and increase numbers of faculty of color. Many also reiterated the need for counter-spaces as discussed above, including black-led student organizations and black cultural centers, and expressly stated that this programming should receive more funding. These students understand that beyond 'diversity and inclusion' initiatives, it is the strategic allocation of tangible resources that stand the better chance at changing institutional cultures.

Our findings, unfortunately, are not at all surprising: they reiterate that white supremacy and racism are abundant in American culture, even in institutional settings that purport to welcome and value all identities, to act as engines of equitable social advancement, and to work for social justice (and to socialize students into typically 'liberal' models of adult personhood and citizenry; see Urciuoli, 2010). Notably, our participants' accounts of their experiences continue to echo—sometimes nearly verbatim—those of black students conducted 20-plus years ago (e.g. Balester, 1993; Solórzano et al., 2000; Wallace & Bell, 1999). By locating the role language and raciolinguistic ideologies play in student experiences of inequity, we hope this work is of use for those looking to incorporate sociolinguistic elements into anti-racist institutional work.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Substantial work, however, does exist within the fields of literacy studies and composition. It is outside the scope of our paper to devote more space to addressing this literature, but see Balester, 1993; Inoue, 2015; Kinloch, 2005; Perryman-Clark et al., 2015; Prendergast, 2003; Smitherman, 1995; Young et al., 2013; inter alia.

[2] Though researchers use a variety of terms to refer to the linguistic variety of institutional power, we will henceforth use the term "Standardized English" to refer to the idealized variety itself, following Charity-Hudley & Mallison, 2015.

[3] Following Lanehart, 2015, we utilize the term to include all varieties of English employed by African American/Black speakers in the United States, without necessarily indexing a narrow set of linguistic features, due to the current study's focus on student experiences with language ideologies.

[4] While code-switching has sometimes been used in sociolinguistic literature specifically to refer to participants using two or more languages in the same frame, a popular usage in the United States has recently emerged, which defines it as moving between AAL and Standardized English. Since this is the usage most frequently used outside of linguistic journals, as well as the usage employed by our participants, the paper will utilize this definition going forward.

[5] Within the American system, colleges with selective admissions base decisions on high school achievement and/or standardized test scores, and students compete for limited spaces.

[6] By 'labor', we do not mean the division of social tasks executed through language, such as child-rearing, or the division between contributions to meaning. Our use is most in line with the concept of linguistic practice as subject to commodification as elaborated by Urciuoli and LaDousa (2013).

[7] The current study refers to the students as 'participants' due to the fact that it is explicitly not ethnographic in nature, though it did use some qualitative interview methods as well as community recruitment. We do not aim to present the students as individual subjects who interact with each other in a community, and we do not frequently include multiple comments from the same student. For this reason, for clarity and to avoid placing too much emphasis on the individual as opposed to the larger patterns of experience, we do not assign pseudonyms to the individual participants.

[8] Land-grant universities and colleges received land from the U.S. government to offer practical educational opportunities. In American parlance, the term is often used to signal that an institution's founding mission is to serve a broad array of residents, rather than an elite class.

[9] Our participants referred to the way of speaking originating in and associated with African Americans by a number of different labels. It was not uncommon to use the term 'slang' where a linguist might use 'AAL' or 'AAE' to refer to the whole variety, and this remains a reflection of public ideologies about AAL as something less than a fully developed linguistic system.

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