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When I Cry, You Cry. We Cry, Together: The Intersectional Nature of Subalternity in American Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

In 2022, Parker et al. published a special issue in Research Issues in Contemporary Education with the intention of curating manuscripts addressing marginalization in higher education. Within the framework of Subalternity/Subaltern Studies, the current study employs a Postcolonial Critical Discourse Analysis methodology to investigate the intersectional nature of the 11 included manuscripts, thereby advancing the special issue. Findings highlight recurring themes including individual experiences, the need for theory to inform practice, and a focus on classroom dynamics. Additionally, within each manuscript numerous key terms are referred to relating to diversity, racism, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Last, from the findings, Black Women are prominently identified as subaltern within higher education and victims of the power dynamics at play.

Keywords: Higher education, subalternity, historically black colleges and universities, black women, diversity, racism, power

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The margin is an interesting place to live and work. Spivak (2011) called it "the silent, silenced center" and further posed the question, "Can the subaltern speak? Or rather, do oppressed individuals have the ability to contribute to and advance spaces where they are being oppressed? Can they forge change for a better future for themselves in a system that does not value them? Understanding marginalization and living on the margin in any context is of importance to studies of intersectionality and subalternity because "race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 357). In other words, identity categories, regardless of which ones, are always the result of and subject to oppression by those in power. Furthermore, being subjected to the margins is a means of maintaining the status quo.

Recently, Parker et al. (2022a) brought together 24 authors to produce a special issue comprised of 11 manuscripts published in *Research Issues in Contemporary Education* (RICE). This collection was aptly titled "Letting the Marginalized Reestablish the Margins: The Multicultural Dimensions of Academia." It aimed to provide a space for minoritized voices from the BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, first-generation, non-native English-speaking, secular, non-heteronormative conforming, and various other communities to advance the growing movement to reform academia to be a catalyst for positive change for all individuals, not only those who have historically benefited from it. This article seeks to further their work on marginalization in American colleges and universities by investigating the intersectional nature of subalternity as presented by the authors in the collection. The following sections provide contextualization related to the need for this study within the existing research. Then, the remaining sections discuss the methods used along with the findings and further discussion related to their relevancy. This paper closes with commentary related to subalternity in higher education.

Rationale

Workers in any organization find struggle in systems where power is used as a weapon against them as a form of oppression (Spivak, 1994). Employees are driven by the desire to either advance professionally within or outside the organization. Because of the hierarchical structure of power in higher education, it is common that such struggle happens in binary pairs: students and faculty, faculty and administration, administration and boards of directors, political officials, and/or other decision-making stakeholders. As we know, "the link to the workers struggle is located in the desire to blow up power at any point of its application" (p. 67). In understanding that oppression has no boundaries and that the oppressed can only speak and know their conditions when given the chance, this manuscript adapts Spivak's question to the work of Parker et al. (2022a) in an effort to advance the conversation

from “Can” to “How”. Further, this research seeks to understand if, and in what ways, the subaltern is speaking in higher education as a way of further conceptualizing relationships of power within large bureaucratic organizations such as colleges and universities and the role of intersectionality in maintaining and breaking oppressive systems.

Positionality

The researchers involved in this study are aware of their proximity, biases, values, and perspectives related to this study. As editors of the special edition, the authors understand we have unique proximity and responsibility to the texts. Likewise, as mostly African American and all higher education professionals working in the deep south, our perspectives align closely with the ideas represented within the texts. We have intersectional identities and experiences similar to and/or related to the forms of identity discussed by contributing authors, including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, language, and ability. We all have deep commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in all its forms.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Subaltern is defined in this study as the notion of having inferior rank within an American college or university or the idea of a faculty member, staff member, or student within an American college or university who is subject to the hegemony of those in a position of power (Ashcroft et al., 2000). While subalterns are usually denied power within a space, these individuals normally also have less access to the means by which they may control their own representation and cultural and social institutions. Thus, regardless of those who are subaltern, the key common denominator is resistance to the dominant group.

Subalternity works in terms of binary relationships between the subaltern and the dominant group (Ashcroft et al., 2000). Spivak (1994) argued that the notion of being subaltern is built on the inherent attributes that define the group. Thus, the group will never be able to speak for themselves as long as they are viewed as subaltern by those who hold the most power. The issue is that because they did not create their subalternity, they will never break free from it. Moreover, there is no way that the oppressed or politically marginalized can resist their subalternity. To be heard, they must speak in the language of the dominant group at a level they can hear and in a way that they understand. The formation of dominant groups is usually classified as official history or something that is documented, implying that the creation of the subaltern is the result making it the subject of an activity that established the ruling group.

Spivak (1994) viewed subalternity from the perspective of natural selection, meaning they were born into these roles rather than forced into them. Moreover, there exists a direct relationship between desire, power, and

subjectivity. The subject will always desire the power of hegemony meaning that individuals never want to go against their interests. Hence, the desire for power is driven by the goal of changing the societal dynamics of who is in power and who is a subject. The margin can also be considered the silent, silenced center of a culture or society marked out by epistemic violence. The subaltern cannot speak. It is the therefore their job to fight for equality for all in the space while occupying it so that they eventually can.

To study the subaltern, one must consider their objective formation, their active and passive affiliation to the dominant political formations, the birth of new parties and dominant groups, the formations that the subaltern produce to press their claims, how the new formations function in the old framework, and their relationships to trade unions and political parties. Moreover, no act of subalternity can be delinked from hegemonic power. Subalternity only exists because there is a group in power to establish its anthesis, the hegemony.

Subalternity research looks at power dynamics among groups of individuals, and the nature of subalternity is pervasive in higher education around the world. This investigation centered on this concept within higher education by specifically looking at the discourse produced by Parker et al. (2022a) related to marginalization in academia. It ranges from issues of curriculum and instruction (Grosfoguel, 2013) to issues of students and belonging (Kim, 2012). This research aimed to uncover marginalization in the context of faculty by studying the work of Parker et al. (2022a) as discourse in order to bring attention to the ways that this same dynamic can be seen among higher education professionals. The following section will provide a brief review of the existing literature on the topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education replicates a workplace culture that divides physical and mental labor by class and the division of capital on the one hand, but on the other, it also maintains the need to struggle and further conflict over resources to maintain each unit (Sotiris, 2014). Interestingly, a transformation of the current structure of higher education is also plausible when the mission and daily work of an institution align with the entrepreneurial nature of where the institution is shifting, thus creating an interest convergence (McGowan & Shipley, 2020). In other words, it is through being forward-thinking that most units and institutions can advance themselves beyond their current constraints.

Subalternity in Higher Education

The existing research on subalternity in higher education mainly addressed issues of students (Dubin & Beisse, 1967; Kim, 2012; Wagner, 2013), faculty (Brissett, 2020; Gilmore & Smith, 2005; Mishra, 2012; Orelus, 2018), and curriculum and instruction (Sant, 2017; Winkler & Scholz, 2021).

While each area at some point did intersect with the other, these three were evident as overarching themes within the literature.

Teachers and Students

The power dynamic between teacher and student is based on the temporality of the situation. In other words, because both parties understand that the teacher is there permanently while the student is not, the teacher will always maintain situational power. This dynamic is furthered by the consistent and blatant disregard by upper administration and higher-ranking faculty (Dubain & Beisse, 1967). It was not until higher education adopted a more capitalist approach that an emphasis on return on investment shifted this power dynamic. This dynamic shifted away some power from faculty and gave it to the students and stakeholders. Amplified by their status, minority students are significant victims of this power dynamic. As suggested by Kim (2012) in discussing Korean students:

> The organizational excellence of the American university system, its superior academic ethos and norms, and the hope of interaction with celebrated scholars all demonstrate how the global hegemony of the American university system is daily embodied in looking at issues of concern to faculty. (p. 473)

Essentially, the American system reinforces the hegemonic aspects of this power dynamic by sustaining subalternity and attracting individuals willing to become subaltern.

Faculty and Staff

Traditionally, university employees are hierarchically organized by job duties and labeled either faculty or staff (Trowler, 2014). Faculty have perceived higher status and working conditions, based on tenure, promotion, and incentives such as sabbaticals. Yet, the spaces of the Faculty Council and/or Senate, and tenure-track faculty positions are dominated by white males, including their values, which reinforce Christian, abled-bodied, monolingual, and presumably heterosexual norms (Grosfoguel, 2018; Orelus, 2018). Further, a white male majority continues to dominate key decision-making roles, such as department chair, dean, provost, president, and chancellor (Orelus, 2018). This lack of diversity is significant as it contributes to the epistemological and ontological formation of the institution, which are then reproduced within the student body.

Notably, regardless of minority scholars' contributions to the western academy, subaltern professors are most often subjected to inhospitable and inequitable treatment from administrators, colleagues, and students. This is a direct result of their lack and/or blatant disregard for awareness and an unwillingness to embrace diversity and the value that non-traditional faculty and staff bring to postsecondary education (Orelus, 2018). Thus, the term subaltern in the higher education context refers to non-normative (white,

Christian, able-bodied, monolingual, Cis-gendered males, middle-class) people who become college faculty or staff. It is because of people from privileged positions in society who are unwilling to acknowledge discrimination based on race, gender, accent, language, sexuality, or religion that people placed in subaltern positions must face discrimination and resist systemic oppression as a daily reality upon entering the academy for as long as they remain within the system.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and instruction literature suggests that bodies of knowledge coming from non-western perspectives are usually treated as academically inferior (Grosfoguel, 2013; Wright-Maley, 2022). Grosfoguel (2013) argued that epistemologies, cosmologies, and knowledge produced by non-western worldviews or world regions that are not aligned with dominant groups are always considered inferior in western colleges and universities. This is evident in course offerings at colleges and universities across America. This is also exemplified by the fact that not a single Historically Black College or University (HBCU) has been designated a Research One institution, and all HBCUs lack funding when compared to Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). Interestingly, HBCUs are leaders in STEM and produce thousands of doctors, lawyers, and great contributors to global society from all backgrounds.

Power in higher education is a coveted commodity by faculty, staff, and to a lesser degree students. This institutional power is recognized as a tool for change and also a tool for maintaining the status quo. Further, institutional power is a mechanism for maintaining power or obtaining it to make a change. To understand the intricate nature of subalternity in higher education, this study investigated these dynamics by analyzing faculty discourse on institutional power. The following section will explain the methodology of this study, including the research questions and the credibility, including reliability and validity measures, embedded within the of the study.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a case study method based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Mullet, 2018; Sanz Sabido, 2019), and a theoretical lens that combined CDA and Postcolonial Theory to look at 11 manuscripts published in a special issue of RICE and find oppression and power imbalances (Sanz Sabido, 2019). This section discusses the demographics of the data set investigated, as well as the coding scheme and procedures used to conduct the study.

When considering existing literature on the topic, the researchers asked the following research questions:

1. In what ways does the discourse produced by Parker et al. (2022b) illuminate the voices and experiences of subalternity in higher education?
2. What are the key themes and subthemes related to subalternity highlighted by the work of Parker et al. (2022b)?
3. What are the intersections of marginality in higher education as established by the work represented in Parker et al. (2022b)?

The sample for this study consisted of 11 manuscripts published in a special issue of the academic journal *Research Issues in Contemporary Education* (RICE). RICE, the official publication of the Louisiana Educational Research Association, is indexed in the U.S. Department of Education ERIC and EBSCO databases. The special issue, titled "Letting the Marginalized Reestablish the Margins: Multicultural Dimensions of Academia," aimed to publish manuscripts that addressed marginalization, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in higher education. Per the call for papers:

> The purpose of this special edition is to bring scholars together to investigate the relationships of power, equity, equality, and the lived experience of scholars in higher education throughout the world. Through embracing the idea of counter-narrative research, articles in this special collection should be geared toward presenting authors' lived experiences in higher education. This can take the form of purely qualitative, purely quantitative, or mixed method research. (Parker et al., 2021, para. 3)

The current study extends the work of the special issue by analyzing the published manuscripts as a form of published discourse.

Demographics

The manuscripts included in the special issue were produced by 24 authors with higher education affiliations in the United States. Of the 11 articles, four were produced by single authors, and seven were co-authored. Among the 24 authors, it was assumed that six authors identify as male, and 18 authors identify as female. This was concluded via their pronouns used throughout the works and/or their author affiliation statements. Additionally, five authors identified as white and 19 identified as scholars of color. Notably, none of the white authors contributed single-authored articles. All the articles in the dataset were qualitative and reflective, meeting the special issue's intended purpose of capturing the lived experiences of subaltern members of academia.

Coding scheme

An abridged version of the coding scheme designed by Mullet (2018) and Sanz Sabido (2019) for conducting CDA research was utilized in this study. In line with Stage 4 of Mullet's (2018) CDA framework, the primary objective was to identify overarching themes within the texts and their contextual surroundings. Guided by Spivak's (1994) concept of subalternity, a deductive coding procedure was employed to create a codebook, forming the foundational framework for identifying and analyzing pertinent data segments.

Next, the researchers marked the text of the articles for words or phrases that were deemed relevant to the initial codes. Through multiple iterations, labeled text segments were recorded in a codebook, and a final list of key thematic terms was generated that are common to postcolonial discourse. The initial codebook contained approximately 32 key terms. These terms underwent refinement using a constant comparative process, and 10 key themes emerged. Through revisiting the texts, the themes were deconstructed, which produced an additional 33 more terms, for a total of 65 terms. Finally, the terms were operationalized for the specific research project.

Procedures

The initial coding of the manuscripts was conducted by two of the researchers and the data set was reviewed for consistency by a third researcher. The procedures for conducting the Critical Discourse Analysis were as follows:

1. Based on previous research (Mullet, 2019), a coding scheme was designed.
2. The 11 articles were grouped based on overarching themes and given to researchers to perform the CDA based on their areas of expertise. One group consisted of articles related to education (Beckers & Calderon, 2022; Broussard & Mallery, 2022; Gadsden, 2022; Matius; Thompson, & Luney, 2022; Shelby-Caffey, 2022). The other group comprised manuscripts based on cultural issues (Cosey, 2022; Hatcher et al., 2022; Johnson & Culverson, 2022; Reed et al., 2022; Thompson, 2022)
3. One article (Parker et al., 2022b) was analyzed by both authors to ensure the validity and reliability of the coding scheme. After analyzing the manuscript, the researchers compared notes and discussed their approaches to the analysis.
4. The coding scheme was revised to alleviate redundancy and ensure thoroughness in the data collection.
5. A critical discourse analysis was conducted on each manuscript and data was collected.
6. Data from both sets of articles was brought together as one large data set.

Credibility and Validity

As it relates to credibility of the analysis, because of the researchers' close proximity to the data set, we recognize the potential biases (i.e., confirmation, author, disciplinary, research interest, personal relationship) that may have arisen during data analysis. We acknowledged these biases and took proactive steps to minimize their impact on the analysis. Specifically, we maintained self-awareness throughout the analysis process by understanding that our biases, beliefs, and assumptions may influence interpretations and judgments. As the CDA was conducted, we employed a range of analytical approaches and perspectives. We considered multiple frameworks, theories, or methodologies to ensure a comprehensive evaluation. The research team used peer collaboration to receive input and engage in discussions on our different perspectives and areas of expertise.

Moreover, the data was triangulated as part of the collaborative process, and the multiple data sources minimized the impact of personal biases. Reflexivity, which is the act of examining one's own assumption, belief, and judgement systems, and thinking carefully and critically about how this influences the research process (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), was used to gauge the potential influence of personal experiences, values, or cultural backgrounds was explicitly discussed throughout all stages of analysis. In these ways, the researchers systematically and continuously questioned their assumptions and critically reflected on their interpretations to guard against biases.

Lastly, the researchers maintained transparency by documenting and describing the analytical methodology used, including the steps, criteria, and processes followed. This transparency helped to ensure accountability and allowed collaborators to assess the validity of the analysis. The researchers' critical engagement with each other through counterarguments, alternative perspectives, and contradictory evidence helped to challenge biased interpretations by critically evaluating different viewpoints. To maintain transparency and integrity, the researchers made sure to reflect on and acknowledge the limitations and potential biases inherent in the analysis by clearly discussing them in the findings and conclusions upon completion. By implementing these steps, the researchers attempted to minimize the impact of biases and strive to conduct a comprehensive and unbiased critical discourse analysis.

To further ensure reliability of the analysis, the researchers worked to extract both qualitative and quantitative data from the 11 manuscripts. Quantitative data allowed the researchers to further report the frequency of key topics, themes, and ideas (Sanz Sabido, 2019). Further, qualitative data complements quantitative approaches if they are decontextualized and lack essential details (Sanz Sabido, 2019).Qualitative analysis allows researchers to answer questions related to the underpinning ideologies, how meaning is

prioritized within the data set, and to consider the producers of discourse and the discourse itself. The qualitative dimension of this study consisted of analyzing the texts as one single set of data and also as individual units within the dataset. Both approaches were needed because in postcolonial approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis (PCDA), quantitative approaches further allow researchers to analyze the entire data set to draw overarching conclusions.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings and is divided into five sections. Section one will focus on quantitative data and present the key information found in the data set. The rest of the sections will present qualitative data. Specifically, the second section will present an analysis of the context in which each manuscript was produced and the producers of the text. Section three will discuss the overarching theme found in the special edition, along with the key themes that were found in each manuscript. Section four presents the language that was used throughout each manuscript in relation to the perspectives and ideologies surrounding it. The final section will present key concepts that were found consistently throughout each manuscript when compared to one another.

Quantitative Analysis

To gain a sense of the underlying themes, tones, and values presented across articles, key thematic words and concepts were counted per the coding scheme devised based on the work of Mullet (2018) and Sanz Sabido (2019) during the data analysis process. Table 1 shows the frequency with which each term was thematically applied across all articles.

Table 1
Key Themes Within Sample

Term	Frequency of theme
Diversity	9
Inclusion, Marginalization/Marginalized/Margin	8
Equity	7
Power	6
Oppression; Intersectionality	5

Knowledge; desire	4
Resistance, Social Justice, Critical Race Theory	3
Marxism, Feminism, Interest Convergence, Subjectivity	2
Subaltern, Hegemony, Multiculturalism, Invisible Other, Colonialism	1

The most frequent thematic term was diversity (9), while the least frequent thematic terms were subaltern, hegemony, multiculturalism, invisible other, and colonialism (1). What can be determined from quantifying the themes is that authors tend to frame their discourse more often in more concrete and operationalized terms such as marginalization, diversity, equity, inclusion, power, oppression, and intersectionality than in theoretical terms. For example, the authors wrote about diversity as an adjective to describe subjects or groups of subjects instead of problematizing and discussing the sets of principles that undergirded the terms themselves or generalizing the term. This suggests that there is a preference for addressing diversity in practical, observable contexts rather than in an abstract or theoretical form. By focusing on the tangible aspects of diversity, authors can create a more immediate and relatable impact on their audience. However, this approach may, in some cases, limit the depth of understanding regarding the systemic and philosophical foundations of diversity-related issues, potentially overlooking the broader, more complex frameworks that shape these concepts.

Key Information & Context and Background

Numerous themes emerged after identifying and analyzing key information, context, and background within the data set. Marginality/marginalization, experiences, agency/empowerment, Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory/ Resistance, politics, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) emerged as major themes from the articles. When looking at the authors themselves, there was a balance of university types across Carnegie-ranking institutions. Two authors' institutional affiliations were at HBCUs. The authors who contributed to the data set were affiliated with universities including, but not limited to, Southeastern Louisiana University, Wichita State University, Bowling Green State University, Fordham University, Tulane University, Jackson State University, Tennessee

State University, the University of Kentucky, the University of Toledo, and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

Per their author affiliation statements, the authors research interests included aspects of education including curriculum and instruction, multicultural education, education law and policy, underrepresented student motivation and success, first-year experience programming, higher education administration, educational leadership, emotionality of whiteness, black womxn and femmes, Special Education, and World Language Education. Likewise, contributing authors held various professional roles within institutions of higher education, including instructors, professors, academic advisors, directors, deans, and coaches.

The data set maintained a consistent focus on marginalized communities within higher education. Particularly, contributing authors across the data set communicated their interest in working with or researching topics related to marginalized groups, including underrepresented students, women of color in academia, Black women student affairs professionals, and social justice issues impacting marginalized BIPOC communities. Moreover, many of the contributing authors included in the data set are well-published authors in their respective fields. These contributing authors have published numerous articles and books.

Qualitative Themes

As shown in Table 2, three overarching qualitative themes were discovered among the articles in the data set: experiences, theory-informing practice, and learning environments. Experiences refers to manuscripts that focus on the experiences that have taken place as a result of the authors' employment and involvement in higher education. Theory-informing practice included manuscripts that addressed some type of educational theory and provided critical commentary on how it can be implemented in the classroom or university setting. Learning environments included manuscripts that focused specifically on changing aspects of the classroom and/or the teaching and learning process. In some cases, themes overlapped. For example, during data analysis, Matius et al.'s (2022) main theme was assigned as "experiences" due to its prominence in the article. However, the authors also employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) to analyze their experiences, making "theory-informing practice" a secondary theme. It is important to note the fluidity of themes here but remain aware that the main themes were assigned based on how they foregrounded the authors' work.

Table 2

Key Overarching Themes and Subthemes

Overarching theme	Author	Main Themes	Subthemes
Experiences	Parker et al. (b)	Marginality	The margin as a place of reflection; the margin as a place of thought; the margin as a place of possibility; the margin as a place of reflection for radical change
Experiences	Matius et al.	The intersection of domination of women of color in higher education	Whiteness and the power white people carry and abuse in higher education; the subordinate position of people of color in the academy; the need for change in the academy
Experiences	Shelby-Caffey	Racism in America; racism in education	The relationship between national racism and politics at the local levels; the ways in which minority educators must endure racism in their teaching
Experiences	Thompson	Identity/Experience	The experience of isolation and loneliness as the only Black woman in a doctoral program. The experience of microaggressions and discrimination. The politics of identity and faith in coping with academic hazing. The need for doctoral programs to address the issue of academic hazing for Black women doctoral students.
Theory-Informing Practice	Hatcher et al.	The Value of CRT	Racism in the educational experiences of African American males. The potential of CRT to help

			educators understand the educational experiences of African American males.
Theory Informing Practice	Reed et al.	CRT as a call to action	The challenges of using CRT in education. Defining CRT and its origins. The key tenets of CRT Debunking misconceptions about CRT. The importance of CRT A call to action
Theory Informing Practice	Gadsden	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)	CRP allows students from community-based backgrounds to succeed. Students who attend HBCUs normally do so because the core of an HBCU is built on culture and a sense of community. Students need the continuous loving, nurturing, and supportive presence of significant relationships in their lives, particularly their belonging to groups and communities that are communal and culturally focused. This can be achieved through CRP.
Learning Environment	Cosey	Queer Theory as Resistance	The importance of understanding students' prior knowledge and experiences; The use of familiar texts and concepts; The importance of creating a safe and supportive learning environment
Learning Environment	Broussard & Mallery	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	To implement DEI programs, there must be an inclusive space.

Learning Environment	Beckers & Calderon	Intellectual inclusion at HBCUs	The need for more inclusive services for individuals with intellectual disabilities at HBCUs
Learning Environment	Johnson & Culverson	Agency/ Empowerment	The role of libraries in providing access to information and resources. The role of libraries in creating a space for Black people to share their stories and their experiences. The role of libraries in building bridges between Black communities and the larger society. The role of libraries in promoting social justice.

Experiences

Throughout the theme of Experiences, contributing authors offered their experiential interactions as examples of profoundly inequitable structures within higher education. Parker et al. (2022b) discussed the importance of the margin as a space for reflection and the radical openness of choosing the margin as a standpoint. Thompson (2022) addressed the challenges faced by a Black woman in a doctoral program, including isolation, discrimination, and academic hazing. This includes an emphasis on the need for doctoral programs to address these issues by offering support, fostering inclusivity, and creating a welcoming environment for Black women doctoral students. Matius et al. (2022) presented the argument that White people are often implicated and complicit in microaggressions and racial stonewalling in higher education based on their emotional (re)actions. Shelby-Caffey (2022) relayed her experience in teaching during the 2016 election as a Black woman and how the election caused a climate where racism became more overt, and racists felt more comfortable expressing themselves. In each of these articles, authors provided descriptions of their experiences and reflected upon them to argue that there is a dire and urgent need for significant reforms in higher education to provide more equitable working environments for People of Color.

Theory-Informing Practice

Articles that represented this theme offered robust explanations of theoretical perspectives and how they can be applied to understanding the utility and importance of particular practices within higher education. Hatcher et al. (2022) and Reed et al. (2022) contributed manuscripts centered on CRT.

Hatcher et al. (2022) studied the impact of racism on the educational experiences of African American males, including microaggressions, stereotypes, and institutional barriers that hinder their academic achievement. In their article, a sense of belonging emerged as a theme in the discourse. In particularly, the authors communicated ways in which individuals can recognize the potential of CRT to help educators better understand how racism and oppression shape experiences and thus be able to develop more effective teaching and support strategies. In addition, they discussed concerns about the potential drawbacks of CRT, such as the potential for division along racial lines and the justification of reverse discrimination.

Reed et al. (2022) provided an overview of CRT and its origins, emphasizing its emergence as a response to the limitations of traditional civil rights approaches. In their article, they outlined the key principles of CRT, highlighting its focus on systemic racism embedded in laws, policies, and institutions. Their article also addressed common misconceptions about CRT and called upon educators, policymakers, and others to utilize its principles to promote racial equity and social justice.

Gadsden (2022) presented an argument for how teachers must use methods that will allow their students to achieve their maximum success in higher education. Specifically, her perspective was that CRP was most effective in the classroom, especially at HBCUs. She suggested that students need the continuous loving, nurturing, and supportive presence of the significant relationships that are built via this approach in their lives, particularly African American students who come from communities that are communal and culturally focused. In each of these articles, the contributing authors provided arguments for why theory is most effective for informing educational practice and the benefits that such theories have for education and society as a whole.

Learning Environments

Within the theme of learning environments, articles focused on discussions within particular spaces of learning in higher education. These were either physical spaces, such as libraries, or theoretical spaces that construct supportive learning conditions within specific groups. Johnson & Culverson (2022) examined how libraries play a crucial role in providing access to information and resources that are valuable to Black communities, enabling them to learn about their history, culture, and rights. They explained how libraries create a safe and inclusive space for Black individuals to share their stories, fostering community and raising awareness about their unique challenges. Additionally, libraries help bridge the gap between Black communities and the larger society by promoting understanding, tolerance, and challenging stereotypes through the sharing of experiences and resources. Ultimately, libraries contribute to promoting social justice.

Cosey (2022) posited that understanding students' prior knowledge and experiences is crucial in teaching queer theory, enabling educators to address misconceptions and prejudices respectfully. The author suggests using familiar texts and concepts to broaden students' understanding of queer theory's applicability to diverse experiences. Creating a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and having their questions addressed is also emphasized.

Broussard and Mallery (2022) assessed the value and importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Specifically, they detail the work of the diversity council at their university. They addressed the culture and climate required to implement such initiatives on college campuses and the benefits to everyone.

Lastly, Beckers and Calderon (2022) suggested that more opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities at HBCUs make for a better society. Hence, there is a need for more inclusive services for individuals with intellectual disabilities at HBCUs. Throughout all of these articles, the value of space and/or place was highlighted as having the potential to support marginalized students, faculty, and staff within the formal or informal borders of campus life.

Language Use

As shown in Table 3, there were multiple key terms that frequently appeared throughout each manuscript. These terms reflect the usage of language and the ways in which the authors frame their argument. To provide context, the table includes a listing of the most frequently used words within each article, as well as examples of their usage. .

Table 3
Key Terms Used

Author	Terms	Examples
Parker et al. (b)	margin, space and place, center, other, radical, reflection	"Personal narratives allow the **marginalized** to tell their story and relate their experiences on the fringe of mainstream society". (p. 4) "When considering the collegiate encounters of **marginalized** communities, pedagogical strategies, and content for instruction also

		hold importance in conversations held by higher education professionals". (p. 5)
Thompson	Black woman; doctoral student; academic hazing; microaggressions; discrimination; politics; identity; faith; support; inclusion; welcome	"As a Black girl in the Midwest, I was used to being the "one and the only." Still, in some ways, the experience of being a **Black woman** doctoral student in a predominately white program felt lonelier and more isolating"(p. 54). "**Academic hazing** within doctoral programs is often so deeply embedded within the doctoral experience that it becomes normalized". (p. 54)
Johnson & Culverson	library Black community access resources voices heard public sphere agency social justice	"They argue that "libraries can play a vital role in providing **access** to information and resources for Black communities" (p. 150). "Libraries can play a role in promoting social justice by providing access to information and resources about **social justice** issues". (p. 153).
Hatcher et al.	CRT, African American, males, education, racism, academic achievement	**"CRT** provides a historic and legal lens through which to explore systemic structures that have not provided equitable access to opportunities for African Americans in the United

		States of America". (p. 139)
		"Teaching the true history of **racism** in the United States of America will go a long way to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past" (p. 140)
		"The pedagogical approach to teaching **queer theory** should not make students feel as if they are compromising their already precarious position within the social order". (p. 99)
Cosey	queer theory, resistance, HBCU, students	"Techniques for deferring (or de-centering) possible **resistance** to queer theory include contriving instructor fallibility by mis-labeling queer theory readings as something other than what they are, e.g., identifying works by Roderick A. Ferguson or Barbara Smith as being within the rubric of Marxist Theory or Gender Studies". (p. 98)
Reed et al.	CRT, Racism, Education, Research, Marginalized, Framework, Equity, Social justice, Systemic	"**CRT** creates a platform to understand and eliminate **systemic racism** and create the **equity** deserved by every human being". (p. 122)
		"While more research is necessary to demonstrate how the **CRT framework,** when used in **education,** can inform how race and **racism** manifest themselves

		in our institutions and can used as a valuable tool to critique and approach our existing systems, acknowledging these critiques can dispel the misperceptions and help us to understand how this praxis can advance **social justice**". (p. 123)
Shelby-Caffey	Racism, education, America, PWI	"Critical Race Theory (CRT) in **education** is a framework that draws from the lived experiences within BIPOC communities to understand how systems of power mediate **educational** trajectories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001)". (p. 74-75) "As a BIPOC faculty member at a **predominantly white institution (PWI),** my experiences have mirrored those described in the literature (Lazos, 2012; Niemann, 2012; Orelus, 2013; Pittman, 2012; Rollock, 2012)". (p. 75)
Matius et al.	CRT; white; women of color;	"Though initially a loose metaphor to illuminate how whiteness operates on its own degeneration, the comparison between a **white** dwarf in the universe and **whiteness** in the academy are quite analogous. Both burn, fuel themselves on degeneration, and are none other than death itself—the ultimate

		Death Star". (p. 27)
		"Fortuitous are these tenets in this analysis because, as we, **women of color,** are both raced and gendered (see Crenshaw, 2017), so too are these caricatures of Beckys, Karens, Tomáses, and Dianes (see Matias, 2019). However, despite being both raced and gendered, we are not raced and gendered in the same way. For the **women of color** in the counter stories above, they are the victims of baseless **white** emotionalities expressed onto them, oftentimes then stereotyped as uncollaborative, suspicious, and incompetent (see Guttierez y Muh et al., 2012)". (p. 22)
Gadsden	CRP, HCBU, students, inclusive/inclusiveness	"Faculty who teach with **CRP,** cultural **inclusiveness**, and funds of knowledge in mind allow these **student**s to bridge their home lives and their academic lives". (p. 41) "Faculty who teach at **HBCUs** may be in a better position to understand such pressures since they may have experienced similar challenges when they attended college". (p. 36)
Broussard & Mallery	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	"The lessons learned include: (a) the impact of

		intercultural engagement on inspiring culture change within an academic college; (b) the importance of getting broad buy-in and engagement from students, faculty, and staff for making process; and (c) successful strategies for advancing **diversity, equity, and inclusion** at the college level". (p. 103) "The purpose of this article is to describe the plan that was implemented by the college to develop the infrastructure for a learning space that meets the needs of all stakeholders in relation to **diversity, equity, and inclusion"**. (p. 104)
Beckers & Calderon	Inclusion; intellectual disability; HBCUs	"By this definition, as a society, we are socially responsible for the cultural competence and experiences of Black students with ID by affording them the opportunities to attend an **inclusive** postsecondary **HBCU** program; therefore, there is an immediate need to establish such programs". (p. 49-50) "The future can provide opportunities for Black students with intellectual disabilities share the same cultural

	experiences and postsecondary education at a **Historically Black College or University** while preparing to become contributing members of society and reducing the negative outcomes of the intersectionality of being Black and having an **intellectual disability**". (p. 50)

According to the data in Table 3, the special edition concluded with an overall theme of racial harmony, equality, and social justice. In general, the contributing authors communicated a meta-message of equality for all, not just racial equality. As a whole, authors also communicated a strong stance in support of bettering HBCUs and dialogue related to the Black and/or African American community.

The language used by each contributing author expressed their perspective toward the specific topic they addressed. Parker et al. (2022b) used mostly the active voice as a method to emphasize the agents of the actions. There were a few instances of passive voice in the article, but they were used sparingly. Thompson (2022) employed the active voice when describing their own actions, but used the passive voice when describing the actions of others. They also used first person throughout the article. Johnson & Culverson (2022) likewise used the active voice, but passive voice was used in some cases when the authors wanted to emphasize the action rather than the actor. The authors did not use first person in the article, but they do use the pronoun "we" in some cases when they were referring to themselves as a team of researchers. Hatcher et al. (2022), Cosey (2022), and Reed et al. (2022) used a combination of active and passive voice. They also interchange perspectives by employing a mixture of first and third persons throughout the manuscript.

Shelby-Caffey (2022) used a descriptive style with long sentences and more active voice usage. Matius et al. (2022) also used the active voice with a heavy emphasis on description. Similarly, Gadsden (2022) included a thick description, but they presented their work via a narrative approach that included the use of the first person.

Unlike all other manuscripts, Broussard and Mallery (2022) approached their manuscript from a technical and descriptive narration-based standpoint. They included minimal analysis with a heavy focus on providing description and a matter-of-fact writing tone. Beckers and Calderon (2022)

approached their manuscript from an explanatory perspective by providing thick descriptions and explanations to support their claims, along with quantitative data and statistics. Overall, the majority of authors used the active voice to communicate their message. Regardless, the contributing authors used a variety of discourse, including active and passive voice, and first-person and second-person point-of-view, to present their arguments.

Key Concepts in the Manuscripts

There were numerous key concepts that were continually addressed by multiple authors throughout their articles. These concepts provided a framework for the content focus of the discourse. Table 4 highlights discourse, in the form of key concepts, that were included throughout the sample.

Table 4

Key Concepts Addressed

Key concept	Authors
Marginalization/Marginalized/Margin	Parker et al.; Thompson; Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Cosey; Reed et al.; Matius et al.; Beckers & Calderon
Diversity	Parker et al.; Thompson; Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Cosey; Reed et al.; Matius et al.; Broussard & Mallery
Inclusion	Parker et al.; Thompson; Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Reed et al.; Matius et al.; Beckers & Calderon
Understanding	Parker et al.; Thompson; Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Cosey; Reed et al.
Equity	Parker et al; Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Reed et al.; Matius et al.; Broussard & Mallery

Black	Parker et al.; Thompson; Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Cosey; Reed et al.
Experience	Parker et al.; Thompson; Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Cosey; Reed et al.
Racism	Parker et al.; Thompson; Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Reed et al.
Social Justice	Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Reed et al.; Matius et al.; Broussard & Mallery
Identity	Parker et al.; Thompson; Hatcher et al.; Cosey
Reality	Parker et al.; Thompson; Johnson & Culverson; Cosey
Equality	Parker et al.; Johnson & Culverson; Hatcher et al.; Reed et al.
Knowledge	Parker et al.; Thompson; Johnson & Culverson; Cosey; Reed et al.
Intersectionality	Parker et al.; Thompson; Cosey; Reed et al.
Oppression	Parker et al.; Thompson; Cosey; Reed et al.

The key concepts, as an indicator of discourse content focus, included in Table 4 were terms or ideas that were mentioned by four or more of the authors. The most discussed topic was marginalization, followed by diversity and inclusion. Parker et al. (2022b) addressed a majority of key concepts in the data set, followed by Thompson (2022) and Johnson & Culverson (2022).

The frequency of key concepts such as marginalization, diversity, and inclusion is logical when considering the call for articles (Parker et al., 2021) explicitly solicited manuscripts based on marginalization. Thus, it can be

concluded that the articles maintained the intended focus of the guest co-editors. However, what is interesting to note are the key concepts that emerged and were employed to facilitate discourse on marginalization. These terms included phenomenological discourse, such as experience, reality, and understanding. As a form of internal relations among the texts (Mullet, 2018), this prevalent phenomenological discourse established the goals of the articles, provided a structural pathway for the texts, and allowed for the foregrounding and clarification of the authors' positionality.

Limitations

While the findings of this study provide a more detailed understanding of subalternity in American higher education, there are some limitations to the study. First, the researchers for this study also served as editors of the manuscripts included in the special issue. The limitation means that the researchers also played a role in the editing and writing process of the finalized manuscript, which essentially helped to produce the discourse as well. Another limitation of the data is that the authors present their discourse in a professional, filtered manner. Hence, while multiple themes, concepts, and terms have emerged, the true nature of subalternity in higher education is not fully depicted, as the authors had to meet certain standard conventions of scholarly publication to be placed in the special issue.

Additionally, with a case study sample size of 11 articles representing 24 authors, generalizability is limited. The special issue was curated to ensure thematic consistency and coherence across all included manuscripts, but each contribution was selected based on its alignment with the central theme of marginalization in higher education. By limiting the analysis to the manuscripts within the special issue, we aimed to maintain methodological alignment. The use of Postcolonial Critical Discourse Analysis was consistently applied across the 11 manuscripts, allowing for a robust and comparative exploration of the intersectional nature of subalternity in higher education. Likewise, the decision not to notify the authors included in the special issue about the creation of the current manuscript was based on a combination of oversight and specific considerations related to the nature of this study. By doing a bounded case study, our objective was to provide an analysis based on the content that was publicly accessible to readers without involving the authors in any pre-publication review. Likewise, the manuscripts were officially published at the time of this study, hence, the researchers viewed them as a public document.

Delimitations

The largest delimitation of this study was that the researchers also served as editors of the special issue. This closeness with the texts allowed us to become extremely familiar with the manuscripts and their authors. However, by maintaining an extended exposure to the works, the authors were

able to be more critical in their work, having read each manuscript multiple times before and during data analysis for this study. So, familiarity with the sample may also be a benefit as it leaves less room for missed key information.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study shed light on multiple ideas for decolonizing academia. Generally, higher education researchers know that "issues of diversity and inclusion are central in higher education today, and they will only become more important in the future as U.S. demographics change and globalization accelerates" (Barnett & Felten, 2016, p. xii). As the subject of this inquiry, the special collection presented the textual discourse of minoritized voices. By investigating the investigations, the research team aimed to provide validity and advance a degree of generalizability among these published works. The voices of the contributing authors in the special issue were originally intended to address multicultural issues in higher education. Thus, this study aimed to investigate our understanding of discourse about marginalization within higher education through the lens of Postcolonial Critical Discourse Analysis (PCDA) using Subalternity (Spivak, 1994) as a framework for studying the intersectional experience of the subaltern.

In response to Research Question 1, the discourse produced by Parker et al. (2022a) provided a space for subaltern higher education professionals to tell their story and speak out against their subalternity. In doing so, the most frequent theme that the authors addressed was diversity. The contributing authors come from a range of institutions and levels within the institution. The findings of this study suggest that at the core of the changing nature of higher education, passive subalternity, and power dynamics, is the need for diverse groups of individuals at every level. As the traditional nature of the academy is shifting, subalterns are aiming for greater voice and variance and a shift in the traditional model of academia to allow others to share in the power held historically by a select group of normative individuals.

There were a lot of variances in language devices, which is further reflective of the argument for greater representation of oppressed and subaltern groups in higher education. Likewise, as suggested by Orelus (2018), the subaltern can speak back if they just speak. In this case, the authors were speaking back against subalternity in higher education by using the language and context most impactful to higher education professionals, the professional literature, and by doing so in a diverse way, they showed that arguments for greater equality can come in many forms.

In response to Research Question 2, the three overarching themes of experiences, theory-informing practice, and learning environments were identified as the areas of focus by the authors where more work was needed

to advance power dynamics in higher education. Specifically, the experiences of the subaltern, the approaches used to advance them and the greater society, and the spaces where learning is taking place are all areas of interest when trying to investigate subalternity in higher education.

Specifically, there was a notable assumption of the "Other" and power dynamics within the higher education context. While some mention racism, it is not explicitly grounded in subalternity or postcolonial discourse. This observation aligns with the notion that "'Postcolonialism' is the theoretical wing of post coloniality. It refers to a mode of reading, political analysis, and culture resistance/intervention that deals with the history of colonialism and present neo colonial structures… It is, in short, a critique. It invokes ideas such as social justice, emancipation, and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination, and exploitation" (Nayar, 2008, p.17). However, it is important to note that some articles did not fully delve into the second part of the quote, which involves using these ideas to oppose oppressive structures. Instead of directly challenging oppressive systems, the articles tend to narrativize the margins, navigating or subverting dominance.

Lastly, it is important to note that there are some missing terms, such as subaltern; epistemic violence; multiculturalism; epistemology; cosmologies; world views; epistemic racism/sexism; westernized university; matrix of domination; postcolonialism; hegemony, that the researchers saw in the literature that were never used in any manuscript included in the sample. This is important to note because while the focus of this manuscript is on what content was included, it is also important for future researchers to focus on "what is missing," examining what is being said and, more importantly, what is not being said. This involves identifying the gaps and absences in discourse and investigating the implications of these exclusions. By studying the missing key terms, PCDA aims to uncover unexplored, or less-explored, aspects of power structures, ideologies, and hegemonic forces that shape and constrain the representation and interpretation of certain topics or groups. Moving forward, these are areas for further research and reflection.

In response to Research Question 3, there are multiple intersections of identity established in the manuscripts. Mainly, they pertained to issues of race, gender, sexuality/sexual identity, intellectual capacity, and type of institution. From the data, it emerged that Black women in general are the subalterns of higher education. Specifically, Black women who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community face multiple levels of subalternity. Regardless of their representation in teaching, research, or service, black women face varying levels of resistance while doing their work in higher education and must continuously battle against the colonial matrix of domination, particularly fueled by patriarchy and racism.

IMPLICATIONS

Subaltern groups, by definition, are often subjugated by individuals, groups, or, more often, by organizational power structures. The intersectional markers of subaltern commonly relate to minority ethnic, female or non-binary, low-income, non-heterosexual, and non-Christian individuals. In higher education, this is commonly reflected in their absence from senior leadership positions. Thus, the question of whether research on subalternity can find ways to delink from the colonial matrix of domination and power is of interest to those looking for something new. If one breaks away from the power structure of higher education, must they either exist in their current state as their once-subaltern self or change to adjust to their newfound position of power? As demonstrated in this study, postcolonial critical discourse analysis allows researchers to shift the focus from "Can the subaltern speak?" to "How can the subaltern speak?" as a way to acknowledge their agency and presence within discursive spaces. By examining how the subaltern speaks, PCDA seeks to understand the diverse range of discursive practices, linguistic choices, and rhetorical devices used by marginalized individuals and communities to navigate and resist dominant discourses. This approach recognizes that the subaltern`s ability to speak is not a binary question of mere existence or absence but rather a complex process influenced by power dynamics, social contexts, and historical conditions.

By utilizing Subalternity as a framework and PCDA as a method, this study aimed to understand the dynamics of power in higher education. Through looking at a special edition of *Research Issues in Contemporary Education* that focused on marginalization in higher education, we showed that the subaltern can speak back, and they are talking about diversity. Just as with all other fields, the future of American colleges and universities is diverse (McGowan & Shipley, 2020). There is an expected growth in the number of faculty and staff from various backgrounds. Hence, for future sustainability, higher education needs to look away from maintaining traditional demographic norms and toward embracing diversity.

As suggested by hooks (1994), “the unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that the classroom will be uncontrollable” (p. 39). This study uncovered that among multiple things, diversity work is most critical, along with the idea that there is a need to listen and understand the experiences of higher education professionals, along with understanding the research, particularly theory, that will inform higher education practice. However, as previous research (Tinto, 2015) and the findings of this study suggest, the classroom as an educational space is the core of higher education and deserves attention when considering issues of power dynamics and marginalization.

Moreover, when looking at the intersectional nature of marginalization, these findings communicate that Black women are

disproportionately subaltern in higher education. They are intersectional victims of racism, sexism, marginalization, microaggressions, and white emotionality (Matius et al., 2022). Thus, by reflecting on the question posted by Spivak (1994) within the contemporary context, the findings of this study have exposed the need for future research to explore the question, *Can Black Women in higher education speak?*

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