

Apology or Opportunity? A Glance at Campus Responses to Racial Incidents

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of racial incidents on three different university campuses. In doing so, the researchers utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework which allowed them to examine the different tenets regarding these three racial incidents.

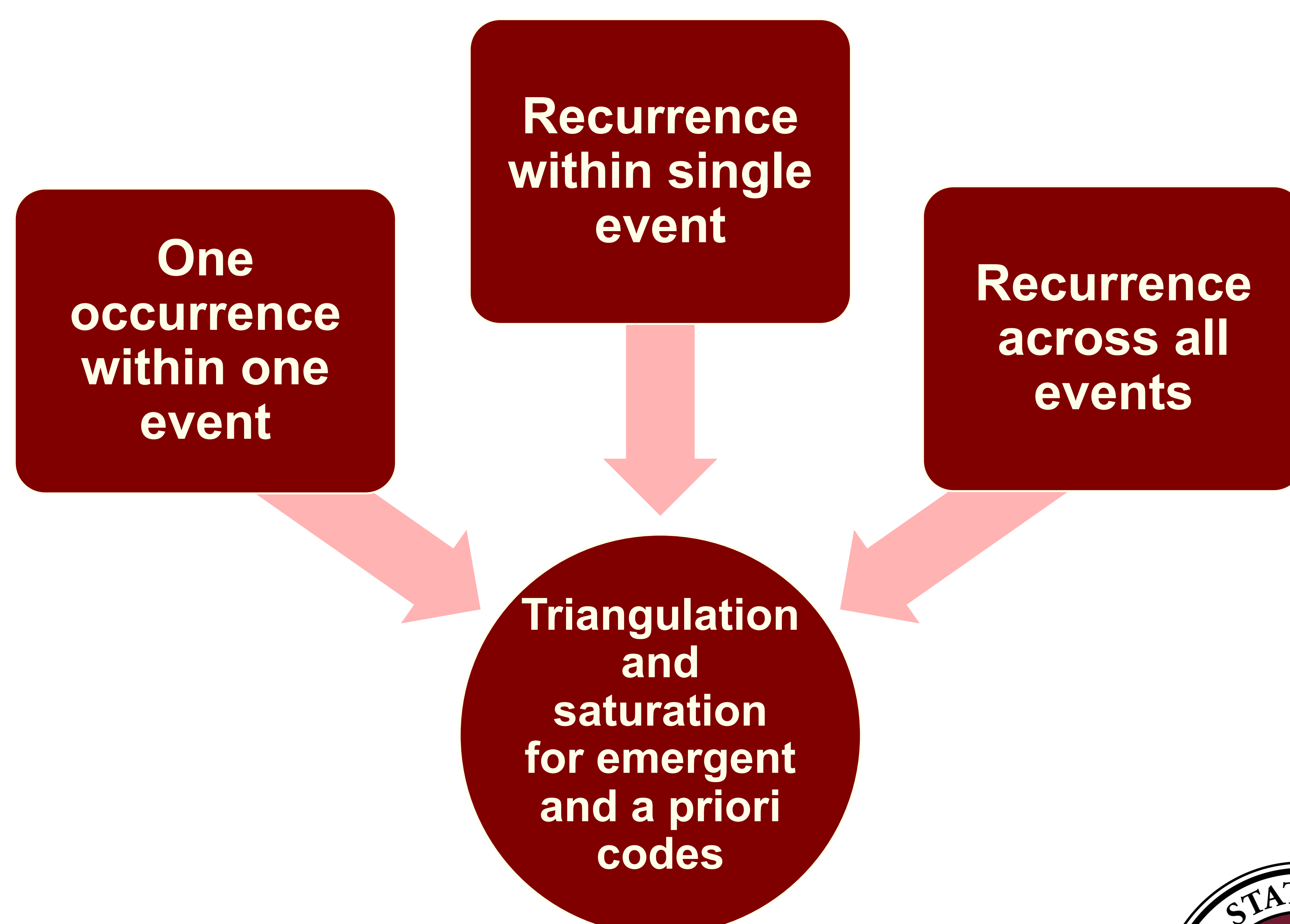
Positionality: As a former student who attended a predominately white high school and currently attends a PWI (Predominately White Institution), I have experienced racial battle fatigue from racial incidents on campus. I believe it is important that the research agenda pertaining critically explores underlying factors that perpetuate racism.

What is critical race theory?

What tenets examine the institutional responses towards racial incidents?

Theoretical Framework

We used CRT to develop codes which identified tenets that further show patterns of racism being seen as an opportunity instead of inequity. CRT examines that **race and racism are all throughout society** and are deeply hidden in the U.S. educational system. The figure below shows the process of triangulation we used as we developed codes aligned with the tenets of critical race theory (Creswell, 2007).



Method

Research Design

Throughout this qualitative study, three racial incidents occurred between February 2012 and October 2012. In the winter of 2012, Delta Delta Delta & Lambda Chi Alpha hosted a “Cowboys and Indians” themed party which was brought to the NSA’s attention on Facebook. After receiving media attention, the institution apologized by sending out a statement clarifying that they had no racist intentions. Following the letter, they also had a forum as a follow up. In the fall of 2012, UT Austin Tri Delta threw a “fiesta-themed party” and used offensive slogans such as “illegal immigrant”. The same process was used to “apologized” to those impacted. They “apologize” and refuse to accept responsibility for the impact of their offensive actions which augments the tenet of dominant ideology as overreliance on remorse and regret. Dominant Ideology identified as statements from recognized student organizations stated, “Tri Delta does not condone cultural insensitivity or racism” (Davis, 2016). Additionally, Chi Omega at Penn also threw a “fiesta themed party”. The study states “Does not support the organization’s values or what they aspire to be” (Davis & Harris, 2016).

Research questions: How does this prevent leaders from participating in racial incidents?

Findings

Throughout document analysis, I triangulated qualitative research by writing memos and bracketing, which was used for the initial investigation rather than my own personal thoughts and beliefs (Moustakas, 1994). All documents were analyzed with codes of themes/tenets such as racism as an endemic, interest convergence, dominant ideology. Dominant Ideology identified as statements from recognized student organizations stated, “Tri Delta does not condone cultural insensitivity or racism”. Further Alpha Tau Omega stated that their organization “does not condone racial discrimination of any kind”. In the apology letter from the student organization at UT Austin, they failed to acknowledge the offensive slogans paraded at the fiesta theme party.

Results

Conclusion

It is also important to acknowledge that not all racially charged incidents are the result of fraternity and sorority organization gatherings. However, they do play a role and future studies should examine other events that may/may not contribute to offensive parties. Additionally, the recommendations provided may not be transferable to all higher education settings. However, I believe this study accurately assessed the three racial incidents through a CRT (Critical Race Theory) Lens.

Discussion

Throughout the three racial incidents, campuses and student organizations respond utilizing a lack of action-oriented language, overreliance upon remorse and regret, and failing to claim responsibility. At the Cowboy Party The DU at Penn State failed to mention the specific names of the organizations which allowed for a depersonalized acknowledgment of wrongdoing without fully claiming responsibility. Additionally, only two members were present, and they promptly exited. Further, there was an overreliance upon remorse and regret. Regarding the dominant ideology tenet, campuses and organizations focus on intent to have a fun social gathering and connotating offensive clothing as insensitive. However, overemphasis reflects a refusal to acknowledge any wrongdoing. Additionally, the campuses failed to claim responsibility as there was a unanimous effort to distance themselves from offensive actions. Some quotations from the study: “The actions taken by these students does not reflect the values of university”, “These costumes and this group do not represent fraternity and sorority life” (Beatty, 2018). Again, this allows for a master narrative of white ignorance displayed as insensitive actions and not racial incidents.

Key References

- Davis, S. & Harris, J. C. (2016). But we didn’t mean it like that: A critical race analysis of campus responses to racial incidents. *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs*, 2(1), 62-78.
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PURPOSE

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