Article

"(De)constructing NASCAR Space": A Black Placemaking Analysis of Fan Agency, Mobility, and Resistance

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Abstract: This article examines how blackness is not only situated within sporting spaces, but also, and more narrowly, experienced within a historically and predominantly White sporting space—that of NASCAR. To explore and define Black individuals' racialized experiences and movements as NASCAR fans from their perspective, this article uses a qualitative approach as grounded in narrative inquiry. Findings suggest that Black fans shift the otherwise oppressive geographies of NASCAR into sites of belongingness, celebration, and enjoyment, which advances the theoretical understanding of how "White spaces" can be contested through processes of racialized resistance. Thus, through the process of Black placemaking, Black fans construct and employ practices to transform their geographic "immobility" (both discursive and physical) into a reality that subverts racism and White supremacy more broadly.

Keywords: agency; auto racing; blackness; race; space; sport

1. Introduction

As perpetuated by American culture, a normative association exists between whiteness and mobility, which in turn has allowed for the development of a perceived "non-White" movement as negative and threatening in nature [1]. Accessing mobility and the opportunities that accompany is not a socially neutral process, but rather, is historically entrenched within racialized hierarchies of power, such as that of White supremacy [2]. In short, movement as it exists within the U.S. remains to be a racialized geographic reality. Nevertheless, spatial analyses of sporting contexts have largely been situated within the purview of gender and sexuality, as little inquiry has been conducted on how sporting spaces are racialized. Moreover, concerning the importance of Black mobility struggles, much of the extant scholarship has focused on athlete resistance by way of activism (see [3] for a socio-historically contextualized overview of African American athlete activism). That is, little discussion exists on the environment(s) through which these resistance movements take place.

According to Lipsitz, "the strong desire to move freely across space formed an important part of the Black spatial imaginary, but it has rarely been easy to translate those hopes of moving freely with the ability to actually do so for African Americans" [4] (p. 66). By not taking a more multidimensional approach to resistance that incorporates a spatial lens, this runs the risk of not only naturalizing the displacement of Black Americans, but promoting the potential erasure and foreclosure of the emancipatory potential and human experiences of Black resistance to oppression. Through an examination of the moments and experiences that take place beyond overt forms of resistance (i.e., activism, protest), we may be better positioned to understand the transgressive ways in which ordinary Black Americans employ strategies of resistance.

It is in a similar vein that the participants of this study shared the ways through which they have created sites of support, belonging, and joy in the constricting contexts of a historically and predominantly White sporting realm—that of the National Association

for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). For that matter, how exactly do Black NASCAR fans establish places for themselves in such environments? NASCAR is a White space with socio-cultural, -historical, and -political attachments to whiteness, where being White is implicitly constructed as the norm. Despite the dominance of whiteness in NASCAR spaces, Black fans are able to find moments and spaces to come together and create Black places. With that being said, this study seeks to move closer to a better understanding of how Black NASCAR fans co-create and foster Black places.

However, in order to accurately and appropriately represent the cultural and racial identity of blackness, "it is vital to recognize the social heterogeneity of blackness, particularly in terms of class, and to see that the 'black community' is a nuanced and complicated entity, composed of and concealing a variety of communities" [5] (p. 118). It is from a similar vantage point that Welburn and Pittman posited that variation within the racial attitudes and experiences of Black Americans must be privileged to gain a contextualized understanding of how these individuals "perceive the obstacles that they face and the strategies they believe are necessary to overcome these obstacles" [6] (p. 526). Moreover, Brown et al. argued that by "centralizing whites' racial attitudes to the extent that blacks' racial attitudes are neglected, much of what we know is unreliable . . . because the voices and experiences of blacks are systematically excluded" [7] (p. 554). Rather, for these authors, a systematic investigation on intragroup variation among Black Americans is of key importance to not only re-center the perceptions of Blacks in research concerning these communities, but also—and more narrowly per the nature of this study—to better contextualize and understand blackness within social spaces such as NASCAR.

Given that movement within the spaces of NASCAR is a racialized process as dictated by and beholden to a cultural identity explicitly reserved for Whites, understanding Black spatial mobility on the part of the active sporting actor within NASCAR—whether that be driver, crew member, official, executive, track worker, or in this case, fan—becomes an important endeavor as it concerns contextualizing how and in what ways the Black fan not only moves, but makes sense of oneself as they negotiate, subvert, and/or survive the White supremacist underpinnings of NASCAR. That is, how and to what extent do Black fans negotiate, survive, and/or subvert White supremacy as it exists within NASCAR sporting spaces? To do so—and as derived from the experiences of this study's participants—I engage what is known as "Black placemaking" to demonstrate how Black fans construct and employ practices to transform their geographic "immobility" into a reality that subverts racism and White supremacy. Thus, to conceptualize how Black fans construct Black places within NASCAR through a placemaking lens, such may allow myself, as the researcher, the ability to offer insight into the lived processes of engagement of Black fans without minimizing oppressive realities.

2. Literature Review

Since NASCAR is a space where being White is implicitly constructed as the norm, there is much to be explored regarding the ways in which the spatial boundaries, practices, and separations—as structured by whiteness—impact the contestation and negotiation of meaning making processes in the production and consumption of NASCAR space(s). As already noted, the racialized geographies of NASCAR are embodied across a myriad of events, locations, scales, and social settings, which allow for NASCAR to serve as a point of exploration on the meaning making processes of Black fans (see [8]). In other words, how and to what extent might Black fans negotiate, survive, and/or subvert whiteness as it exists within NASCAR sporting spaces? To move in this direction, I argue that our attention must be oriented toward not only scholarship that speaks to understandings of blackness and Black mobility through White spaces, but also, a conceptual approach to better examine the interrelationships between agency and oppression concerning the lived experiences of Black individuals.

2.1. Seeking an Understanding of Blackness

The challenges in understanding blackness within social spaces such as NASCAR are inextricably linked to the task of comprehending what is meant by whiteness, due to the fact that both cultural constructs are mutually informing and fundamentally related. Much like whiteness, blackness delineates a particular position in the broader social structure, one that can inform or define the lived experiences and life chances of individuals who identify (or are identified) as "Black" [9]. Commonly held sensibilities on race are informed by the oft-imagined polar opposition of these constructs, however, little is understood on racial dynamics outside of characterizations of these constructs as simply social conditions. Instead, blackness (as is the case with whiteness) is a relational identity, which means that the relational aspects that constitute blackness are of key importance to better understand the role that marked (and unmarked) dynamics play in shaping discourse on this identity source—blackness [5]. This is made apparent when considering how blackness has (and in many ways, continues to be) characterized within the annals of social science research by the opposite condition, as has been afforded to that of whiteness. Thus, the lived experiences of Blacks have been obsessively examined in singularly racial terms, which only further necessitates that research inquiry acknowledge and engage with the mutability of blackness, as argued by Austin:

> Blackness is about meanings and definitions, and about social practices and social identities informed by those ideas. The meanings and definitions of blackness change over time and from place to place. The racial structures that restrict and shape Black social life change with time and place. Black people's identities change with time and place because their sense of who they are similar to, and who they are different from, changes. The variety of historical ways of understanding blackness, as well as the shifting and varied notions about who counts as Black at any one moment, makes it much easier not to construe this cultural construct in abstract or essentializing terms [10].

(p. 19)

Nevertheless, while it is impossible to answer with any certainty exactly how blackness is defined, few would argue about the national experience and social realities of being perceived as Black that are experienced by most African Americans. According to Shelby, "the choice not to self-identify as Black, whatever its rationale, does not dissolve the often constraining social realities that are created by the fact that others may insist on ascribing such an identity to one and consequently may treat one accordingly" [11] (p. 213). Though not a monolithic group, African Americans occupy a unique position within the creation/nexus of the American experience. While specificity of place, individual agency, and generational differences are not to be ignored, the very nature of the collective Black experience in the U.S. highlights commonalities among African Americans, whose beliefs and attitudes were shaped in relation to this larger understanding. Regardless of how Black individuals collectively define themselves in general, there is a link between experiences had, stories told, and a larger historical context within which their lives are embedded.

Through my conversations with each of my participants, I realized that there is no monolithic African American experience within the geographies of NASCAR (or other White space more generally, for that matter). Despite the collective experience of living in a country where racism is endemic to that country's cultural fabric, the experience for each individual African American is uniquely shaped by where you live, educational background, social capital, generational differences, and the decisions one makes. That is, it becomes "important not to confuse or conflate the historical need of African Americans to privilege race in order to address major issues with the belief that all African Americans experience day-to-day life in much the same way" [12] (p. 98). As noted by hooks, there is a danger in African Americans assuming that being Black means there is a common understanding that signifies similarity in thought, belief, and action [13]. While identifying common themes provides a starting point for deeper discussion, a sweeping generalization of the African American experience within predominantly and historically White spaces

such as NASCAR obscures the complexity of that experience and therefore derails attempts at effectively addressing specific issues present within said spaces. However, it should be noted that while I found that my participants' responses to questions about their experiences as NASCAR fans were informed by where they lived, their economic status, age, and to a lesser degree gender, there still existed underlying commonalities in their responses that oftentimes matched or even outweighed their differences. This goes to show that although the meaning of blackness has shifted—albeit in a complex manner—over time, the collective experience of being a Black individual in the U.S. has remained. As noted by Marable, "the collective experience of pain and hardship, suffering and sacrifice has given African Americans a unique perspective from which our consciousness has been forged" [14] (p. 39).

2.2. Black Mobility, White Spaces

Given the overall context and omnipresence of the White space, researchers have found that Black Americans have had to develop strategies to maneuver through a society where cultural racism is inscribed there within [9]. Lacy argued that Black Americans are forced to construct and implement a set of specified public identities, which she purported to be those "purposeful, instrumental strategies that either reduce the probability of discrimination or curtail the extent of discrimination they face in public interactions with whites" (p. 73). Similarly, studies have documented the utilization of "script switching" by Blacks as a strategy to signal their social class and establish a level of commonality with Whites in White spaces, the crux of which rests on the attempt(s) to counteract pervasive racist (as well as classist and sexist) stereotypes that negatively impact life chances and experiences [15,16]. This constant construction and performance of a "public self" can be exhausting and the perceived necessity of upholding such an identity so as to ensure smooth interactions and transitions within White spaces can be infuriating and entail psychological costs [17]. Taken together, there is much to be explored regarding these experiences, as well as the physical, psychological, or social cost of being a Black individual within White spaces, particularly as it concerns a historically and predominantly White space as NASCAR. As such, NASCAR is a requisite place through which to explore the subaltern resistance of Black Americans.

While NASCAR has expanded beyond its southern roots—and recent attempts to distance itself from attachments to a conservative, White cultural nationalism and related brand of reactionary racial politics in the wake of the 2020 racial unrest experienced throughout the U.S.—it remains to be marked, if not outright stigmatized by past (and present) associations with personal and institutional-level reports of racism [18]. Compounding this further is the fact that since NASCAR's inception in 1948, only a handful of Black drivers have competed at the premier level of the sport, as Wendell Scott and more recently, Darrell "Bubba" Wallace, Jr., have served as the sole two to compete in any significant and sustained manner. Specific to Scott's racing career, NASCAR served as an extension of U.S. society in that it "sought to sustain White supremacy by restricting the movement of African Americans on tracks and enforcing the idea that being a major league driver was a livelihood and cultural identity reserved exclusively for Whites" [19] (p. 601). Decades later, Wallace has faced similar resistance, albeit less from the organizational body and more so from the sport's contingency of conservative, White fans. Given the obstacles and discrimination faced by Scott and Wallace, their respective stories are visibly part and parcel of the much larger history of struggle and strides experienced by African Americans in determining the nature and extent of their mobility. By extension, so, too is the experience of the Black fan of NASCAR, who much like their racial counterparts on the track, have had to navigate the racialized geographies of "a sport developed primarily by and for White, working-class men [of the South]" [20] (p. 9).

As it concerns the Black NASCAR fan, virtually no work has addressed this particular community of individuals, let alone focus on how they navigate and move through (and across) oppressive spaces and in turn, work to transform those spaces into "sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance" [21] (p. 31). By not taking resistance seriously, this runs

the risk of not only naturalizing the displacement of African Americans, but promoting the potential erasure and foreclosure of the emancipatory potential and experiences of Black American resistance to oppression. However, at the same time it should be noted that when it concerns agency in relation to Black life, such is typically analyzed within the purview of resistance. Recent incursions within this approach have focused on how Black individuals "survive, challenge, and remake the circumstances structural changes cause, highlighting patterns of resiliency and persistence in spite of structure" [22] (p. 387n). This approach does not reduce culture to a particular set of behaviors, but instead, views it as an amalgam of meaning-making processes. Here, culture as a dynamic phenomenon will not allow a sub-set of Black behaviors to be representative of the totality of Black culture. However, this is not to downplay the role of structure, as there is no clear dividing line between structure and agency. Rather, the mutually constitutive relationship between structure and agency suggests that "Black Americans have exploited as much as possible the assets of particular places, exerting their individual and collective energies to remake structures intended to constrain them" [22] (p. 398)—at the heart of this is what is known as the framework of Black placemaking. But prior to engaging with placemaking, recognition must first be given to the sub-discipline of Black Geographies, an emancipatory intellectual movement through which frameworks like placemaking have emerged. Thus, a brief contextualization is warranted.

2.3. Black Geographies

Although the relatively recent operationalization of Black Geographies purports it as a nascent subfield within the traditional canon of geography, Black geographic thought has existed in some form or other for quite some time—whether that be through the annals of academe, action-based political struggle(s), or day-to-day practices of Black space-making [23]. Stemming from the seminal work of McKittrick and Woods, Black Geographies was offered as a response to the dearth of focus on issues of race, racism, and blackness within geography [24]. Specifically, McKittrick and Woods contested that "the ways in which essentialism situates Black subjects and their geopolitical concerns as being elsewhere" must be examined so that the "daily struggles [. . .] and situated knowledge of these communities and their contributions to both real and imagined human geographies [are seen as] significant political acts and expressions" (p. 4). Underlying this all are the linkages between geographies of domination and that of Black spatial knowledge and resistance, the nature of which reveals how blackness is a key variable in the production of geographic space and the ways of knowing subscribed there within [25].

Through Black geographic knowledge, alternative pathways are forged that allow for new understandings of space to emerge and as such, bring into focus the violence of modern geographic organization. That is, Black Geographies has the ability to bring Black epistemological framings to the forefront as we continue to assess our understandings of space [25]. It is in this vein that Allen et al. argued that Black Geographies should be "seen as a political, social justice project within the academy and society" where spaces of racial oppression are interrogated for their ability to serve not only as sites of constrained mobility, but for social justice activism and reform [26] (p. 1003). Similarly, Bledsoe and Wright called for scholars within the broader movement of Black Geographies to consider the spatial politics of blackness within a multitude of geographical context, primarily as a way to emphasize the importance of contextualizing the plurality of experiences and identities that face Black individuals within their everyday lives [27]. At Bledsoe and Wright's urging, I wish to respectfully follow suit and extend this critical conversation into an oft-neglected area of scholarly inquiry (i.e., sport; more specifically, professional stock car racing via NASCAR), the likes of which require invoking the framework of Black placemaking.

2.4. Beyond Resistance and Towards Placemaking

As argued by Tichavakunda [28], Black placemaking is a useful supplement to existing resistance-oriented approaches such as "counterspaces"—which are "sites where

deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive climate can be established and maintained" [29] (p. 70)—and "making space"—that which "capture[s] the social, cultural, geographical, and psychological dynamics" that African Americans can use to counter and/or reconcile the marginalization they endure [30] (p. 1356). Although theorized within the annals of urban sociology [21] and primarily operationalized within education [28], Black placemaking offers researchers the ability to examine the interrelationships between agency and oppression as it concerns the lived experiences of Black individuals more broadly. Black placemaking is "preoccupied with exploring manifestations of Black social life, wherever, and in whatever fashion, it may be [. . .] to center Black places and Black peoples' collective agency and lives they create in spite of structurally oppressive conditions" [28] (p. 14). That is, Black placemaking examines how Black individuals transform spaces into places, and in doing so, their capacity to shape otherwise oppressive environments into sites of enjoyment and play.

Through the accounts of my participants, I found their experiences as NASCAR fans to be in alignment with the assumptions of a Black placemaking framework. As I will argue, such an approach simultaneously extends the analytic potential of research on and provides a lens to engage more thoroughly with and understand the scale of Black NASCAR fandom, as well as the agency of Black fans. Thus, in providing empirical evidence showing how Black fans shift the otherwise oppressive geographies of NASCAR into sites of belongingness, celebration, and enjoyment, I advance the theoretical understanding of how "White spaces" can be contested through processes of racialized resistance, such as that of antiracism mobility work [19]. Through the process of Black placemaking, my participants constructed and employed practices to transform their geographic "immobility" (both discursive and physical) into a reality that subverts racism and White supremacy more broadly.

3. Method

Participants responded to an advertisement posted in an online social media fan group that serves as a virtual space for Black NASCAR fans to share personal experiences, news stories, and engage in general discussion on matters relating to the sport of NASCAR. Individuals could participate in this study regardless of gender identification and if 18 years of age or older. Specifically, participants needed to (1) consider themselves a fan of NASCAR, and (2) racially self-identify as Black or African American. Sixteen individuals inquired about this study, however, three did not follow up to schedule an interview. Thus, a total of 13 individuals were interviewed, 12 of whom identified as men and 1 as a woman. It should be note that the terms "Black" and "African American" are used interchangeably in this article, which is in alignment with my participants' perspectives that both "Black" and "African American" were appropriate terminologies to racially identify them. Moreover, the terminology "African American" was explicitly used in this article's introduction since 12 of the 13 participants ethnically self-identified as African American.

Data collection utilized a semi-structured interview format. Out of respect for time of the participants and spatial availability, interviews were conducted by way of either telephone or video communication. In order to add credibility and trustworthiness to the collected data, I provided each participant with a copy of their interview transcript to review and as means to conduct preliminary member checks. Additionally, to best preserve their respective communications styles, I only edited certain phrases or words that may compromise anonymity for the participants. As such, any personal identifiers were removed, as well as pseudonyms were given to each participant.

Most interviews lasted around 1.5 h, but a handful were 2 to 2.5 h as participants shared in great depth their respective stories. In total, interviews resulted in over 1300 min of participants' narratives. Narratives were analyzed through multiple constructions and reconstructions, as well as through a process of de- and re-contextualization of the interviews to identify any similar attributes and prominent differences that would offer nuanced insight into the particular experiences of each participant. More specifically,

narratives were examined to understand the context of Black fans and the relative power said context places on their agency, that which became salient through their accounts of interpersonal interactions and decisions (un)made within their particular social contexts. In all, narratives were analyzed in a dialectical and iterative manner, which included the use of memos that outlined both analytic and interpretive decisions made as well as the exploration and modification of emergent theoretical ideas resulting from successive data verification.

Specific emphasis was placed on the situation of participants' agency and experiences within their everyday, embodied circumstances, as well as accounting for my own positionalities relative to my participants. For instance, concerning my gaining access to participants, I needed to be particularly mindful of considerations to be made as a researcher of intersecting privileges. To do so, I made initial contact with the social media fan group administrator to introduce myself, the nature of the present study, my intentions for the study moving forward, and provide an appraisal of my personal (and professional) intentionality as a self-identified White scholar seeking the personal experiences of individuals who self-identify as Black or African American. Since my objective was to curate a space for individuals with marginalized racial identities to share their lived experiences, I wanted to acknowledge and embrace my subjectivity as part and parcel to this portion of the research process. Thus, in acknowledging the "unique perspective" that is held by each of my participants, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the "perspective" that I, as researcher, have brought in my efforts to better understand blackness within this respective context. With that being said, I would like to locate myself as a researcher.

While a personal appraisal, this is not to draw attention away from the presence of my participants, but rather, to acknowledge the reality that my presence ultimately serves as the "final voice" to occur within the collaborative process that transpired between myself and each participant. As the interlocutor for my participants, I chose to locate my work within a critical research paradigm that understands all knowledge and lived experiences to be constructed within a socio-historical context, as mediated by power relations [31]. Additionally, this study draws upon a criticalist epistemology, utilizing a narrative-based approach to represent multiple truths within the microcosm of the lived experience. Such a philosophical location acknowledges my role as being implicitly grounded in the co-production of meaning, and despite the adoption of a critical-based narrative approach, participant narratives were subjected to partial conveyance through my own accounts.

Given this role in such knowledge construction processes, I refer to myself in the first person. While disciplinary expectations will often see to it that first person pronouns are labeled as unconventional mechanisms within academic scholarship, the deference to this normative assumption can (un)intentionally obscure power dynamics that may exist between participants (as the observed) and the researcher (as the observer); these power dynamics can often remain unchallenged, and as Scheurich and Young indicated, contribute to a process of knowledge production that is epistemologically biased and actively delegitimizes the epistemologies of those whose voice is marginalized [32]. Thus, to ensure methodological credibility and in recognition of these considerations, the first person pronoun is used throughout this study so that power dynamics are re-balanced. Doing so will require that I draw attention to myself when my role as an active agent within the broader research process should be made aware.

4. Results

A dialectical relationship between structure and agency, as well as domination and resistance exists for Black NASCAR fans, who are forced to find (and make) meaning in hostile spaces. However, Black NASCAR fans are not just objects of history or of socio-cultural, -economic, and -political circumstances, but subjects that fashion spaces by inscribing them with their own interpretations, meanings, and cultural significance. That is, Black fans are able to shift the oppressive geographies of NASCAR to construct (and provide to one another) sites of celebration, happiness, and play, which is otherwise known

as the enterprise of "Black placemaking" [21]. Through the accounts of my participants, I found their experiences as NASCAR fans to be in alignment with the assumptions of a Black placemaking framework, in particular: (a) navigating practices of secondary marginalization (i.e., Black fans receiving lack of support or stigmatization from other Black people); (b) recovering a sense of agency (i.e., the interplay between Black agency and the otherwise oppressive structures akin to NASCAR and American society more broadly); and (c) social worlds arising from structural racism (i.e., racism as manifest in NASCAR culture inspires creation of new sites of gathering).

In this section, I will outline how Black NASCAR fans navigate and move through (and across) the geographies of NASCAR, and in doing so, work to transform those spaces into "Black places" where they are able to collectively thrive as fans of this particular sport. I will demonstrate how Black fans engage in Black placemaking within a multitude of NASCAR-related spaces (i.e., events, locations, and social settings that exist both at and away from the track). This enterprise of Black placemaking exhibited by Black NASCAR fans reveals that while many Black individuals exist within a fundamentally racialized (and racist) structuring of space(s), such a reality does not entirely consume the energies of this particular Black community. Instead, of importance is how these individuals "make places" amidst and in spite of those racialized realities. Such a perspective captures the attitudes, actions, and meaning making processes of a wide range of Black individuals who consider themselves fans of NASCAR.

4.1. Contested Blackness: Navigating Practices of Secondary Marginalization

Many of my participants disclosed that NASCAR—on account of its historical and present-day attachments to the U.S. South and the racialized connotations there within— endures a stigma within the collective consciousness of African Americans. Despite their own level of fandom, my participants understand this apprehension in engaging with the culture of NASCAR and how some segments of U.S. society may believe that "real" Black individuals would hold predominantly discerning views on the sport. According to Chris (customer service agent, age 59), his fandom has allowed him to be perceived as one who might not hold the view of "real" Black individuals and thus, his blackness has been called into question:

> *At times, I would say I've been in situations where I've been perceived as if I was . . . you may find this kind of hard to believe, but I'm going to say this out loud because it is what it is . . . I've been perceived as not necessarily Black enough. I think Barack [Obama] had the same problem when he was running for President and people would say, "he's Black, but he's not Black enough." You know, I'm thinking to myself, "is there a level of blackness that you have to be in order to be Black?"*

Chris' experiences of having his blackness called into question by other Black individuals is indicative of a phenomenon known as "Blackthink." Conceptualized by legal scholar, Kimberly Jade Norwood, Blackthink is a form of intra-prejudicial behavior that

> *presumes that all Blacks are unquestionably liberal, pro-affirmative action, pro-choice, pro-gay rights, pro-welfare, and most definitely anti-Republican. Some segments of our society not only harbor this presumption but go a step further: they will devalue and marginalize those who fail to comply with Blackthink [. . .] Autonomy and difference are stifled; acquiescence is embraced and rewarded. The price for failing to succumb is high. The dissenter, whom I call the "target," is de-blacked . . . an attempt to strip the target of his or her racial identity [33].*

(p. 147; emphasis in original)

The act of de-blacking can occur in many environments given it serves as a cultural label, if you will, whereby an individual prefers neither to be Black nor identify with Black causes, culture, or people. There exist myriad of ways that a person can be de-blacked, which typically takes place via proxies based on education, hair texture, skin color, wealth, where one lives, how one speaks, one's cultural preferences (e.g., food, music), or even how

one thinks. Moreover, not only may one's blackness be questioned, but their desire to be within close proximity to (or outright embody) whiteness could be declared [33]. It is in this vein that my participant, Marie (writer, age 52), expressed her frustrations in having to reconcile her blackness on account of her fandom of NASCAR:

You're not really recognized anywhere as a NASCAR fan. And then among other African Americans, you're kind of closeted [. . .] they look at you like you're trying to be White. It's really . . . it's very irritating. Like, seriously? You know, why does this have to be about race? It's just auto racing. Jesus, you know? I like this, but it doesn't mean that I've given away my Black female card. It just means I really enjoy it.

In detailing the extent to which she has had to defend her blackness, Marie went on to express the challenge of having to balance these perceptions with the everyday labor of being a Black woman in American society. For Marie, her perception as being "less than" Black on account of her interest in NASCAR is particularly disheartening given the structural barriers, stereotypes, as well as emotional and physical labor she has had to expend as a Black woman throughout her life—the very experiences, she noted, that have and continue to unify most African Americans:

As I've gotten older, I've looked past some of the stereotypes that are laid on you and you kind of unconsciously accept . . . or some of the conditions that you live in. You know, being followed in stores, things like that. I've been able to look beyond that and look at, "wow, African Americans have an incredible history and you're a part of that. That's so cool." So I think as I've gotten older, it's just something more that I've embraced more and I'm not embarrassed about where I came from. But the women in my family were really, really strict with straightening your hair and, you know, don't be too . . . "If you know what you're talking about, just kind of be quiet because they think you're an angry Black woman," and you'd be shunned or fired or whatever. Now that I'm older, I don't care. I don't straighten my hair anymore. I'm sick of it. I cut it all off and I just embrace it.

Here, Marie expands on some of the realities from her life that illustrate the experiences of Black women more broadly, particularly as it concerns how race and gender interconnect to engender a multiply-burdened lived experience. Although contextually divergent on account of Marie's gendered experience(s), Chris' earlier commentary suggested somewhat of a disconnect with what he acknowledged as "real" Black cultural expectations, or rather, a disconnection with such given his upbringing and more recent experiences:

I remember growing up as a kid and I got picked on because I didn't know what chitterlings were. But I didn't know how many people ate chitterlings. I had no idea [. . .] because I never had them before. They didn't exist in my house. So I thought, "okay, that's a little different." But what a lot of it has to do with . . . I think that the perception by people in the Black community has thought . . . now granted, I don't interact with a lot of them because to be honest, I don't have anything in common with them. I didn't grow up in that environment. I grew up in the Northeast. Granted, I've spent time in college and post-college in the South, but I didn't grow up in that environment all the time. So it's tough to get what kind of influence from a place you were never at [. . .] you know, I wasn't around people with my skin color a lot other than my family.

Chris goes on to further contextualize his lived experience, noting that who he is as an individual is a result of his upbringing. He understands the structural implications of growing up as a Black individual in this society and reflected on what his reality may have been had he grew up in a different neighborhood, attended a failing school, and/or was socialized around others who were not given the same opportunities that he was afforded. Much like Marie, Chris expressed a bit of disdain in having had to reconcile his own experiences as a Black individual with the cultural expectations akin to Blackthink. For Chris, the fact that he often moved through predominantly White spaces growing up and has grown an affinity for the sports of baseball and NASCAR does not preclude him from having faced the structural implications of racism. In Chris' words, to be a "Black

man in America is like having a second full-time job," a reality that he has come to realize for much of his adult life:

> *It means that my entire life, I have had to do things a little bit differently than everybody else. I've had to mind my Ps and Qs, so to speak, in public. I get looked at more just because . . . every day I put on this, I have this covering that differs me from typically anybody around me. So I have a different level of standard that I need to kind of keep up with to justify my own, to justify my being wherever I'm at at the time. Which is a little odd, but over almost six decades now, I've just gotten used to it. So I get it.*

The emphasis placed on these last two words was intentional on Chris' part, as he went on to elucidate how he perceives himself relative to the constraining effects of structural racism:

> *Back in the old days, when you apply for a job, you had to put your race down. And I'll tell you, those were applications that probably never got past the vertical file, into the shredder sometimes. But that's just how the system was and so it took decades of evolution over time to get out of that system. And it's going to take more of that as you go forward. I'll probably be gone by then when things kind of really get to a place where things are relatively close to equality. But it's nothing that keeps me awake at night because I figure I can't do anything about it on my own. I'm just going to play the game as best I can with the rules that have been laid before me and go with that.*

As noted here and in the two sections that follow, Chris and other participants astutely contextualized their lived realities as Black Americans. That is, in spite of the deleterious effects of racism and the undue weight of intra-discriminatory practices such as Blackthink, my participants have demonstrated their ability to "survive, challenge, and remake the circumstances structural changes cause, highlighting patterns of resiliency and persistence in spite of structure," the likes of which "are a beneficial specialized knowledge that was accrued to [them] over multiple generations" [22] (p. 387n). The accounts shared by my participants suggest the relative power of their individual agencies, however, remaining in the background is a concern as to "whether unity, given the vast diversity among Black Americans, can ever be achieved," particularly at a time where "exercising choice is often painful" enough for Black individuals in general, let alone "when it comes at the price of personal devaluation" from fellow Blacks [33] (pp. 180–181). But for those who may have engaged the devaluation of my participants, they may not realize that many of them have long engaged with auto racing, motorsports, and automobiles in general, gaining early exposure from family, friends, and/or the local automotive culture within which they were raised. For instance, Marie grew up around auto racing, as her older brother served as a mechanic, welder, and even raced modified stock cars throughout the Northeast (Marie's story will be discussed at further length in the following section). Likewise, others noted having been enthusiasts of automobiles, which served as the natural bridge to developing an interest in NASCAR and other forms of auto racing. This was the case for my participant, James, who noted that his developing fandom for NASCAR in the late-1980s came as no surprise to family and friends alike:

> *For most, because I was a "car nut," the connection made sense, but I think for most of my friends and family it was hard to reconcile, one, the history of the sport and the racism that was attached to it. And then number two, not understanding strategy in sport. For a lot of people who really don't know sport and it really doesn't matter your race or background, they're trying to figure out what's exciting about watching a grown man drive in a circle. And that's the perspective of people who don't know the sport. So you have that thought process and then when you layer on top of that the racial and historical aspects of it, they had a hard time reconciling the two. No one disowned me for it, they still couldn't figure out or reconcile it completely.*

While James' fandom of NASCAR was somewhat misunderstood by those in his personal life, he did not endure the same level of personal devaluation that others in this

study have experienced at the hands of family, friends, and others in the Black community. Nevertheless, what connects James and other participants like Marie and Chris, for example, is the fact that through their fandom of and movement within the geographies of NASCAR, they—as Black individuals—are able to draw on both everyday and formal political action to anticipate, respond to, and affect the social conditions within which they are situated. These individuals have pushed back and reasserted that they are no less worthy of their blackness on account of an interest in the sport of NASCAR. They understand that navigating NASCAR spaces as a Black individual requires a strategic process of movement(s) that has been engendered through an already existent liminal status in most other geographies in their lived experiences. For my participants, to engage with NASCAR is to engage with broader American society—as aptly put by James, White spaces exist everywhere and there's no use in lamenting their presence nor suggesting that NASCAR is, at present, a particularly unique phenomenon in that regard:

> *When you go to the races, the fact of the matter is there's still racism that you're going to encounter at the track. But the fact is, I encounter that if I go to the store. So it doesn't bother me in part because I have a lifetime of dealing with it. I've got numerous techniques to deal with it. So it doesn't really faze me because I know how to deal with it. [. . .] It's easy to pick on NASCAR, but the reality is the racial issues in NASCAR go beyond NASCAR. It just does and it may always be there.*

Taken together, and according to my participants, to be a fan of NASCAR—as a Black individual—is not to accept, condone, or embody the racialized undercurrent of NASCAR's historicized culture. Rather, doing so is a means of activating one's agency to express oneself in a manner and engage in an activity that allows them to make places amidst and in spite of the realities that take place within (and outside) of NASCAR spaces. In other words, as fans of NASCAR my participants have been able to carve out a niche of the broader NASCAR culture, one that embraces and celebrates their fandom while at the same time providing an opportunity to subvert and resist racism, the likes of which replicate their very day-to-day employment of strategies of resistance and survival. Thus, the "how" and "why" associated with Black agency within (and outside) of NASCAR spaces becomes an imperative endeavor in recognizing and better understanding the nuances of intra-racial diversity among Black individuals.

4.2. Survival as Resistance: Recovering a Sense of Agency

The notion of survival as it concerns one's racialized mobility was a strikingly salient point of reflection for each of my participants. For example, Barry (Machine operator, age 51) spoke about an underlying level of awareness that he maintains in situations where he is one of few Black individuals present. Likening it to a sort of "third eye," Barry's awareness was at attention when attending his first NASCAR Cup Series race in 2010:

> *To me, you still have to have that third eye . . . you know, you look for shit to go down [laughs]. Actually, one year . . . I have an RV and I camped out at Dover [International Speedway]. And I've camped out at Dover a couple of times since, but that first time was really rough. I mean it was just rough. The daytime was okay, but nighttime . . . you had people singing rap songs that they shouldn't be singing. So it was kind of rough. But you definitely have to have a third eye and tolerance, when you're camping out anyway.*

Barry went on to explain that although much of his "third eye" was activated through his experiences in the camping section of the race track, he caught glimpses of what he perceived to be other Black individuals engaging with their "third eye" throughout the race weekend:

> *I can remember one time I was in the stands and I was looking with that third eye. I remember two rows down there was a Black man and he had a son with him. I would say the son was maybe eight or nine. He was having fun looking around, watching the race. But the guy, he was just looking around making sure everything was okay. I mean, I can understand that having a son myself.*

While Barry admitted that much of his attentiveness throughout that race weekend—and in subsequent return visits over the course of the past decade—was due in part to a general discomfort with some of the behavior(s) of White fans he witnessed (e.g., White campers using the N-word in the context of certain rap songs) and a level of racialized paranoia, he understood that his seemingly innocuous experiences at the race track could have turned ugly at any particular moment as it has for other Black fans over the years. For instance, Marie discussed at length her experiences attending a NASCAR Cup Series (then Winston Cup Grand National Series) race at Pocono Raceway (located in the rural community of Long Pond, Pennsylvania) in the late-1970s with her older brother, Peter. Unlike Barry's and other participants' experiences—and while the earliest in-person race track experience shared to me by any of my participants—Marie's time at Pocono Raceway was marked by racial harassment and violent rhetoric:

> *Pocono is a good distance from the parking lot to the track. So getting out of the car and walking to get in, you heard the N-word, "when did they start letting them in?" and "get out of here, boy, and take your pickaninny with you." You're like "oh shit, this is serious," you know? They were really rude and racist and I just felt like "are they going to hurt me? Are they going to try to go after me or go after my brother?" I mean, nobody came up to us personally and just told us to get out. It was, just, you're hearing it, it's around you. There was just so many people trying to get into the track and you were just kind of pushed together. But nobody walked up to you and said get out. But you knew you were hearing it. And those horrible, icy stares that I hate, you know, when someone is just glaring at you like they hate you. And it just hurt me for my brother, too, because I knew his intention was totally pure. He just loved it [racing]. I'm like, "why would you call him that? You don't even know him." Here's this guy, who—thank God he didn't go to Vietnam—who at 20 could have done anything in the world. I mean, this is a standup guy, so your [other fans'] prejudice is just horrible.*

It would take over three decades for Marie to a return to a NASCAR race following her experience at Pocono Raceway. While partly a result of the harassment faced at Pocono, Marie's distancing of herself from stock race racing was also attributed to the fact that her then-casual fandom was primarily the result of her brother, Peter's, passion for racing and automobiles in general. Peter grew up around muscle cars in the 1960s, learning the craft of welding and how to be an auto mechanic from their grandfather. This early exposure led to an infatuation with everything and anything automobile-related, as Peter went on to open his own welding shop and even raced modified stock cars at local short tracks throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania in the 1970s and 1980s. After he stopped racing his own car, he even became the crew chief for a White driver who ran dirt modified stock cars. Through most of his involvement in racing, Peter was almost always the only Black person, whether it be at the race track or amongst fellow crew members. As Marie noted, this reality came with its fair share of challenges for her brother, who endured countless verbal harassment from other drivers, crew members, track workers, and spectators alike. It was no wonder, then, for Marie how composed and unwavering her brother remained in his excitement to be at that Pocono race in the late-1970s, even amidst the harassment they both faced. For Peter, this was more of the same racialized callousness that was ever-present in these particular spaces, and as had always been the case, his passion for auto racing was not about to be interrupted or tarnished: "He didn't seem to get angry. He just kind of ignored it. If he felt that, he didn't tell me or my mom. You know, he just did what he wanted to do." Although much of these encounters took place within the "less-polarizing" geographies of the Northeast, these were instances not to be taken lightly. As noted by Marie and other participants, Black Americans have had to long teach themselves and their children how to survive and subvert various forms of racialized harassment and violence.

Here, a key aspect of Peter's resistant survivability was how he exercised agency over his mobility and in turn, used that very mobility to counter and subvert the racist constructions of the race track as a White place. This is similar to what Gilbert discussed in terms of survival within the context of the racial politics of mobility [34]. She argued that

mobility is made meaningful (and in many cases, lessened) through the various strategies of survival that people employ. That is, Gilbert believed there to be a creative agency among certain racial minority communities, such that survival is an active condition that can be fashioned through the day-to-day decisions and practices made to ensure the well-being and livelihood of themselves and their family.

It is this very reality that has allowed for many of my participants to reconcile their NASCAR fandom with the history of the sport. In other words, and as aptly put by my participant, Daniel (retired military, age 44), Black NASCAR fans understand that NASCAR is unequivocally a White space, but so, too, are most spaces in U.S. society—and as such, you have to navigate it accordingly. In noting his level of comfort in traversing race tracks that are typically perceived as less welcoming to Black fans (e.g., Talladega Speedway), William (project manager, age 52) was rather measured in noting the same reality as put forth by others like Daniel:

> *As a Black person, one of the things that you learn is regardless of whether you feel comfortable, you just have to adapt to your surroundings because pretty much everywhere you go outside of your home environment, you're going to be around majority White.*

As per Cresswell, the "politics of race and the politics of mobility" in the U.S. are "joined at the hip" [35] (p. 134). My participants are keenly aware of this reality and have remained attentive to the ways in which their movements, as Black individuals, have been restricted and regulated; thus, this is the vantage point from which many of my participants spoke when discussing how they reconcile their fandom with the socio-cultural and -political attachments of and to the sport:

> *Daniel: I can't change where they came from. I can just help them moving forward.*

> *Greg: I don't have to reconcile the sport itself because if I'm kind of reading from history it started as kind of the outlaw, rum runners, bootleggers, etc. Whereas I kind of know that part of the history, you know . . . the South is the South. And America is America. I'd be "Pollyanna" to say if I didn't think that there were some racist fans. That doesn't have anything to do with my appreciating the competition.*

> *Brad (city manager, age 46): It's not like something where you can't be a fan of something because of its history. There's a lot of that kind of stuff in American history.*

> *James: You think about anything in America and there's a racial component to it no matter what [. . .] I have the right, like anybody else, to enjoy the sport. Now, the fact is that there are people who enjoy it, but don't enjoy being around people that look like me. Well, that's not my problem, but that's their problem. And too many of my ancestors fought and died for the right for me to enjoy life on my terms and that's the way I'm going to do it. Just like there are people who enjoy golf, hockey, tennis . . . sports that have typically been viewed more as White-oriented sports. But NASCAR . . . that's just my thing. You like it, or you don't, at the end of the day I don't care because it's what I enjoy and I don't mind . . . if I'm the only one at the track, I'm the only one at the track.*

As witnessed through the aforementioned commentary of some of my participants, they are aware—as Black individuals—of the attachments of (and to) NASCAR, but are unwavering in their passion for the sport. For these individuals, they hold a level of personal agency that allows them to access the many geographies of the sport and in turn, carve out their own resistant and expressive attachments. Perhaps the best representation of this extension of agency to navigate the geographies of NASCAR was the very "place" from which I recruited my participants in the first place—a virtual community group on a major social media platform. Key to this outgrowth of agency (via the construction of a virtual "place") is the placemaking assumption that Black social worlds are worthy of study, particularly those that arise from structural racism. Given the manner in which race and racism manifests itself within the cultural geographies of NASCAR, Black individuals living and experiencing within these geographic constraints may hold the desire to create new sites of gathering and interaction. Thus, my participants' racialized experiences

as NASCAR fans spurred the creation of unique sites of consciousness, creativity, and gathering, the nature of which is discussed at length in the following sub-section.

4.3. Social Worlds Arising from Structural Racism

Within the U.S. context, Black individuals have used social media spaces (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube) as means "to carve out expressive, resistant, and life-sustaining practices in the face of community, extrajudicial, and state violence" [21] (p. 46). As the centralized voice of the Black community has shifted to Black-oriented social media outlets in recent years, this has allowed for a multiplicity of Black individuals and their experiences to be featured via participatory multimedia platforms. For my participants, they were able to create places and attachments that transform the racialized built environment of NASCAR into something more—in this case, a virtual community created by and for Black NASCAR fans. With that being said, and in order to provide proper anonymity for my participants, I will only go so far in my description of the virtual community, which for those intents and purposes will be noted as a "community group" on a major social media platform. The group is publically visible, but requires admission from an administrator; created for the purpose of bringing together Black fans, it does not limit its community to only Black individuals, however, the administrator is careful in ensuring that potential new community members are respectful of group rules and intentionality—per the group's creator, Brad.

In speaking with Brad, his motivations to create the group were, to him, fairly straightforward: "I just started the group because one didn't exist." Offering a bit more nuance to that decision, Brad admitted that in creating the group he was not trying to make an outright social statement, but rather offer a space where Black fans could come together in a way that had not been previously curated for them. It was in a similar vein that Greg offered his "straightforward" perception of the group's intentionality and overarching purpose, noting the interrelationship between representation and level of comfort within predominantly White sporting spaces:

> We're fans of what we see. I mean, we're fans of where we can identify with each other. If you go somewhere and even if in a hundred thousand people, or let's say sixty thousand people in the crowd, but you see one hundred confederate flags and all you see is what you think is a sea of White . . . it's hard to become a fan.

At a base level, what Greg mentions here is a commonplace experience for Black individuals in attendance at sporting spaces within the U.S. context, most of which serve as predominantly White spaces. As noted by Armstrong, both "subtle and profound elements of racism and discrimination often pervade the culture of many leisure settings in America, creating unwelcoming environments for individuals of color who are often in the demographic minority" [36] (p. 228). Prior to the creation of the virtual community group for Black fans, participants such as Marie indicated that it was these very elements of racist behavior—that which she previously experienced and what she feared would be the reality upon returning to NASCAR races after a nearly 30 year in-person absence—that prompted her to reengage with the sport online through general, virtual communities catering to NASCAR fans. While virtual communities have been found to foster a stronger sense of community and attachment to a particular sporting brand [37], the open-access format of these online spaces likewise allows for fans to share their opinions, engage in arguments, express frustrations, and engage in abusive behaviors that oftentimes goes unchecked and as a result, hold potentially serious implications beyond the scope of cyberspace [38,39]. For that matter, racism is made visible within online spaces not only "when internet-based communication facilitates the sharing of overtly racist sentiments, revealing these old-fashioned racist ideologies to be alive, not defunct, but also when online users highlight the previously hidden mechanisms through which contemporary covert racist structures are maintained" [40] (p. 433). In other words, and as delineated by many of my participants, while "the frequency of overt racism has decreased in most [physical NASCAR] spaces, being replaced by more subtly racialized narratives, the Internet appears to be an exception

where explicit racism continues to proliferate" [41] (p. 877). Thus, it is precisely in this manner that participants were greeted with a reminder of the overt racist behaviors *and* covert racist structures that pervade virtual communities catering to NASCAR fans, much of which came to a head in the aftermath of NASCAR's response to racial injustices—and Bubba Wallace's associated role in that response—throughout the 2020 NASCAR Cup Series season.

Bryan (student, age 22) spoke to the very instances of explicit racism that is proliferated within online NASCAR spaces that was addressed by my participants, the nature of which was made ever the more vitriolic with the racial climate taking place within the U.S. at that time—in particular, the outspoken nature of Bubba Wallace and the support afforded to him by NASCAR as an organizational community:

> *A lot of people are harsh or have some harsh comments about the 'noose incident' regarding Bubba Wallace. It's pretty upsetting and unfortunate just because you see . . . it's like people have their thoughts about NASCAR without being fans or you see people make opinions about NASCAR without ever watching the race or anything. It's like you don't see that on T.V., but when NASCAR makes a post on Facebook and you read through the comments and you see what people are saying, it's like no wonder people from the African American community are shying away from the sport because of people out there that don't want us there and aren't afraid to say it or show their displeasure.*

Similarly, Marie recalled having been a member of a community group that generally catered to NASCAR fans, witnessing first-hand an increased pattern of racialized rhetoric that was being levied against NASCAR as an organization, persons of color who were members of the group, and Bubba Wallace. Through her involvement with the group, Marie found that Bubba Wallace's grandmother was actually a fellow group member, and with all that was transpiring at the time, his grandmother was compelled to defend her grandson amidst incessant attacks on his character, intentions, driving performance, and most pointedly, his racial identity:

> *I was in a group and somehow his [Bubba Wallace's] grandmother was in the group. She's the White grandmother, his Black grandmother died. And the group just got weird. It just got really strange . . . you know, people kind of going back and forth with each other. Then the person who was the moderator, she was always complaining about something. You're only allowed to comment on this thread while the race is on. So in all of that, there's another guy that I met [in the group]... we started talking back and forth and we left the group. And I think Bubba's grandmother left, too, because for some reason they were like attacking Bubba's grandmother. It just got really weird.*

Along with Bubba Wallace's grandmother, Marie and another group member (who she identified as a fellow Black fan) left the group to remove themselves of the increasing level of racialized vitriol. Luckily enough, not long after her departure, Marie happened to stumble upon the community group created by Brad. For her, it was a breath of fresh air and as echoed by other participants, this new group—curated by and for Black fans—presented itself as a space to connect with other Black fans without fear of racist commentary or harassment. To many of my participants, the race-based backlash against NASCAR, Bubba Wallace, and fans of color served as a critical moment for fellow Black fans to come to the fore, resist the conservative, White supremacist-led backlash, and charter a pathway towards a "place" where they could go and express themselves freely without racialized retribution. Thus, it is "these critical moments [that] allow those most affected to shape, counter, and reshape the dominant media narrative, and to continue Black radical traditions of everyday resistance to inequality and erasure" [21] (p. 46).

This agentic move away from experiences of online racism to a "space of their own" served not only as an opportunity to connect with other Black individuals who follow the sport of NASCAR, but also, it allowed one to be who they are without the threat of being judged or stereotyped. Here, the latter portion of the aforementioned sentiment is what my participant, David (entrepreneur, age 36), resonates with the most, that being the

multiplicity of Black individuals and their related experiences. For David, he stressed the importance of the group given that he never had the opportunity to talk about NASCAR with other Black individuals in such a manner; however, above all, he believed that the underlying nuance of this group's significance is not in the ability of Black fans to engage one another in conversation about NASCAR, but in the differences of experiences represented within the group. According to David, the group is actively breaking monoliths about the Black experience:

> It's been a good spot to engage in a Black space about a sport that we love. It's been a great experience, you know? You're going to get your debates, but Black people aren't monolithic. We don't all agree on every little thing which is what's beautiful about us as a people, and you find that in that group, too. We all have different opinions about drivers and we have different opinions about how to handle some of the racial impacts of the sport. You know, we all have different opinions and it's great to be able to have those kind of discussions in a space that's safe for us to be able to do that without having all the other vitriol thrown at us.

Similar to what Hunter et al. found to be true in their case example of Chicago's Black digital commons, this virtual community group serves as "an extension of Black folks' deft harnessing of language and expression across generations," and as "a relatively democratic space [. . .] frequently disrupts the boundaries of blackness to bring a range of intersectional Black experiences to the fore and combat practices of secondary marginalization within the Black community" [21] (p. 50). To this, the agency and intent employed by my participants does cut across generations (e.g., participants varied greatly by age as well as years having followed NASCAR as a fan) and identity sources (e.g., class, gender, region), which, as noted by David, has allowed them to participate in a digital platform where each of these positionalities are affirmed, sustained, and integral to the collective endeavor of the group—that being, more or less, to serve as a "great place to go and talk with likeminded people" (Randy, IT specialist, age 37).

However, while a virtual community, some of my participants would be quick to counter the assertion that the group has little grounding in physical geographies (or rather, the built environment). Participants like, Chris, spoke to the importance of bridging the community and its online identities fostered on the social media platform to actual physical events, such as NASCAR race weekends. In what follows, Chris frames how bridging these geographies is important, doing so from the vantage point of group solidarity and safeguarding:

> I'm not missing that much by not going to Talladega or Martinsville or . . . Richmond would be fine, I think, but the other places, I would just say 'ehhhhh maybe not.' However, that doesn't mean that I would never. That's why groups like [the virtual community], if it gets to the point where you can put together a group of people like that and go in a group where people would actually feel more comfortable, see, then I wouldn't have a problem doing that.

Here, Chris speaks to his trepidation in attending race weekends at tracks like Talladega International Speedway (located just north of Talladega in Lincoln, Alabama) and Martinsville Speedway (located just south of Martinsville in Ridgeway, Virginia), both of which are located in rural, small towns perceived as inhospitable to Black locals and passersby alike. As per Barry, he has heard from other Black individuals familiar with Talladega that "after the race is over, if you're Black, you better get out of there." While Barry said the aforementioned with a chuckle, the same brand of trepidation towards tracks like Talladega was present in our conversation as had been expressed by Chris. However, Chris was quick to touch on something that was likewise shared in my conversations with other participants, which was a willingness to traverse NASCAR race weekends through arranged meet-ups with fellow members of the virtual community. To expand upon this thought process, Chris provided an example in which he was already engaging with as a fan of professional baseball:

I follow baseball a lot and I'm a huge [New York] Mets fan, but I wouldn't go as a Mets fan to Philadelphia on my own. However, there are fan groups that teams have where they organize and they go . . . and there's a group called the 'Friends of Mine' that the Mets have and they go on road trips to cities en masse. I'm talking about a couple of hundred people, and they will go to cities like Philadelphia or to the Yankee games across town where we're not going to be necessarily that accepted because we're going to be wearing orange and blue like a Mets fan, but they go in groups and they're way more comfortable and they know there's some strength in numbers. I think that my trepidation about going to a place like Talladega could be alleviated if I went with a group of people large enough to say 'you know what? I'm comfortable with that.' So, I wouldn't do it on my own. I wouldn't just go with my wife. It would have to be in part of a larger group that I would feel more comfortable. I would never say never because life is too short to say 'I'm not going to go for this reason alone.' But given the right opportunity under the right circumstances, I would definitely go to Talladega because I think seeing a race there would be so cool.

Although the fan group described by Chris is situated within the purview of professional baseball, the overarching purpose reflects the intentions of what Chris and others expressed—an organized fan group experience that not only serves as an opportunity to connect and share an experience with fellow fans, but also, to ensure the safety and well-being of that very fan group from would-be hecklers or even provocateurs of violence. Despite the fact that my conversations with participants took place during the coronavirus pandemic—which, in turn, meant that potential group meet-ups would have to wait until circumstances progressed to a healthy and safe resumption of group-based activities—an overarching sense of eagerness was displayed by many participants to bridge their virtual community with the tangible experience of engaging in person, whether that be at more diversely-perceived venues such as Atlanta Motor Speedway and Auto Club Speedway (located in Fontana, California) or even those ensconced in the cultural politics of the proverbial "Deep South" such as Darlington Speedway (located in Darlington, South Carolina) and Talladega. As championed by Hunter et al., "Black placemaking is always about finding pleasure amid challenging circumstances. It is about asserting Black people's presence through connections" [21] (p. 39). Therefore, in spite of the challenges (i.e., racism) that might arise within either the virtual or physical geographies of NASCAR, my participants have been active in their creativity, positivity, resistance, and collective support as they have engaged in what I argued to be an agentic display of Black placemaking. From the built environment of NASCAR race weekends to the digital sphere of the virtual community group, Black NASCAR fans have engaged their individual and collective agencies to critique, re-imagine, and thrive within a sporting culture that has historically marginalized their attachment to, movement, and presence within its very realm(s).

5. Discussion

In this article, I outlined how Black NASCAR fans navigate and move through (and across) the geographies of NASCAR, and in doing so, work to transform those spaces into "Black places" where they are able to collectively thrive as fans of this particular sport. To do so, I demonstrated how Black fans engaged in Black placemaking within a multitude of NASCAR-related spaces (i.e., events, locations, and social settings that exist both at and away from the track). This enterprise of Black placemaking exhibited by Black NASCAR fans reveals that while many Black individuals exist within a fundamentally racialized (and racist) structuring of space(s), such a reality does not entirely consume the energies of this particular Black community. Instead, of importance is how these individuals "make places" amidst and in spite of those racialized realities. Such a perspective captures the attitudes, actions, and meaning making processes of a wide range of Black individuals who consider themselves fans of NASCAR.

In particular, Black placemaking draws on the notions of linked fate [42] and secondary marginalization [43] to illustrate the reality that since the Black community is bound

economically and politically as a group, their individual outcomes are oftentimes tied to the well-being of the group (i.e., linked fate)—even in spite of internal practices of marginalization that work to threaten group cohesiveness (i.e., secondary marginalization). Moreover, it engages with the tension(s) that exist between these two notions by analyzing the forces that occur within Black places, such as classism, sexism, and transphobia [28]. In all, a Black placemaking perspective "disrupts the boundaries of blackness to bring a range of intersectional Black experiences to the fore and combat practices of secondary marginalization within the Black community" [21] (p. 50).

In short, secondary marginalization is the process by which members of a minority group with more privilege manage or dictate the boundaries of group identity [43]. Whereas Cohen's notion of secondary marginalization "relies upon the agency of relatively privileged subjects in shaping group norms and boundaries," a conceptual variation—that of discursive marginalization—was offered by Hindman that looks at "how prevailing discourses—oftentimes though not exclusively based on descriptive traits—shape the interests and desires of citizen-subjects in ways that differently empower or disempower certain expressions of identity" [44] (p. 191n). Here, the operative notion is that certain expressions of identity within a minority group—whether by individual-level agency or discursive elements—can be privileged, and as a result, stifle the acceptance and/or development of a multiplicity of identities that may comprise said group. As it concerns my participants, this tension presented itself rather poignantly in their respective accounts, the nature of which revolved around their "blackness" being called into question by other Black individuals based on their fandom of NASCAR.

To properly examine (and therefore, understand) Black geographies, one must understand not only how Black individuals move within said geographies, but also, and more importantly, how those movements are constructed in the first place. In noting Cresswell's [45] call for scholars to focus on the specific practices of movement and their attachments to cultural, political, and social meaning, Alderman and Inwood suggested that mobility—as socially constructed and contested—is akin to "work" [19]. That is, the very movement of individuals necessitates a certain level of decision making and accomplishment of tasks, which they termed "mobility work." It is when this work is necessitated by navigating and/or resisting oppressive geographies that this becomes "antiracism mobility work," such that when "African Americans go against the social and spatial friction of immobility and oppression, the labor is even more significant," thus requiring "the broad array of creative and savvy practices required to move in transgressive and resistant ways" [19] (p. 603). To illustrate their point, Alderman and Inwood offered a case study of Wendell Scott's racing career, in particular the bodily, social, and technological practices he used to access and move across the racialized spaces of stock car racing (and more broadly, the U.S. South). However, Scott's antiracism mobility work "complicates our understanding of resistance by fashioning an antiracism mobility in which he challenged white supremacy in NASCAR by simultaneously racing with and against a sport that would have preferred that he disappear from the track" (p. 603).

Given that spatial practices as they relate to mobility and resistance are contextually situated [46], the argument can be made that much in the same manner that Wendell Scott practiced transgression by directly challenging White supremacy from *within* the very sport that engendered it, Black NASCAR fans are actively present within spaces to which they "do not belong." While contextually unique, the antiracism mobility practices of Scott (as well as other African Americans who have followed in his footsteps) and those of Black fans should be similarly interpreted in relation to the broader position of African Americans within the American "racial hierarchy." Having served as a stock car driver "in a region, time, and sport in which white supremacy was not only harsh but could quickly turn violent," Scott's ability to move throughout and in many cases, just plain survive, within these spaces is a reality that reverberates to the present, as "the struggle to survive is a bodily act and black resistance is grounded in meeting the material conditions of the body within an unjust and life-threatening socioeconomic system" [19] (p. 604).

Furthermore, by placing survival in a critical political context, this situates the oppression endured by African Americans, for example, and their opposition strategies within a broader understanding of lived experience(s) and the racialization of spaces that is key to better understanding anti-racist mobility and praxis [47]. Taken together, and to discuss survivability within the context of Black NASCAR fandom, central to the practices of survival and resistance employed by my participants is this notion of agency—that being the agency to navigate these racialized spaces and in turn, carve out places where some of the cultural "power" is removed from the racist White fans who comprise the broader collective culture of NASCAR.

For example, Meyer noted that recent scholarship has started to orient towards viewing minoritized group members less as passive victims of prejudice and more so as actors with a certain level of power to interact effectively with society more broadly [48]. Such a perspective "reflects real and important coping processes [. . .] and affirms the strengths of minority group members and their institutions—institutions that have been resiliently, sometimes heroically, fought for and won" (p. 20). Moreover, to deny individual agency and resilience ignores a bevy of social psychological scholarship that has demonstrated both the importance and utility of coping with racialized stigma [48]. Nevertheless, for the intents and purposes of this study, this notion of "coping" has less to do with ameliorative coping processes and more with the capacity of African Americans to re-work their geographic mobilities as a means to subvert and counter racialized oppression. Thus, to "cope" is to understand the reality that structural factors such as racial discrimination and limited access to resources disproportionately affect one's upward mobility as an African American in the U.S. [49,50].

And lastly, to truly understand how the online virtual community for Black fans of NASCAR—that is, a virtual "place"—was constructed and engaged by my participants, I wish to briefly invoke the notion of "translocal space" [51]. Translocal spaces encompass the experiences and materialities of everyday lives in multiple places, the likes of which can be engendered through emergent technology. Translocal space can become more than an individual's experience and instead, part of a network of multiple localities shared by communities, families, neighborhoods, and groups. Thus, translocality disengages the experience of locality and belonging from being situated in a particular neighborhood or community setting, and in turn, locates it in the mobile bodies and multiplicity of spaces—whether those occurring in the built environment or virtually through digital technologies [51].

Within the U.S. context, Black individuals have used social media spaces (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube) as means "to carve out expressive, resistant, and life-sustaining practices in the face of community, extrajudicial, and state violence" [21] (p. 46). As the centralized voice of the Black community has shifted to Black-oriented social media outlets in recent years, this has allowed for a multiplicity of Black individuals and their experiences to be featured via participatory multimedia platforms. For my participants, they were able to create places and attachments that transform the racialized built environment of NASCAR into something more—in this case, a virtual community created by and for Black NASCAR fans.

6. Conclusions

While this study did not capture the full extent of Black placemaking that may occur within NASCAR spaces (or predominantly White spaces more broadly), these findings might add further insight and value to an emerging line of scholarship that centers Black agency as part and parcel to the everyday life practices and processes of African Americans see [21,28]. Furthermore, by exploring how Black fans navigate existing communities, as well as create and sustain communities of their own, stakeholders may be better equipped to make transformative changes throughout the sporting realm of NASCAR. From a Black placemaking analysis, the ability to identify and create new organizational initiatives and structures that facilitate positive experiences for Black fans may be engendered. In all,

these findings provide evidence of Black individuals "making places" in a historically and predominantly White sporting space.

Taken together, one of the primary themes that undergirded much of this project—as a whole—was the notion of agency. When it concerns agency in relation to Black life, such is typically analyzed within the purview of resistance—and by not taking resistance seriously, this runs the risk of not only naturalizing the displacement of African Americans, but promoting the potential erasure and foreclosure of the emancipatory potential and human experiences of Black resistance to oppression. With that, recent incursions within this approach have focused on how Black individuals "survive, challenge, and remake the circumstances structural changes cause, highlighting patterns of resiliency and persistence in spite of structure" [22] (p. 387n). This approach does not reduce culture to a particular set of behaviors, but instead, views it as an amalgam of meaning-making processes. Here, culture as a dynamic phenomenon will not allow a sub-set of Black behaviors to be representative of the totality of Black culture. However, this is not to downplay the role of structure, as there is no clear dividing line between structure and agency. Rather, the mutually constitutive relationship between structure and agency suggests that "Black Americans have exploited as much as possible the assets of particular places, exerting their individual and collective energies to remake structures intended to constrain them" (p. 398)—and underlying each of the conversations that I had with my participants were the processes of negotiating, surviving, and/or subverting White supremacy as it has played out in their personal lives and within the sporting space of NASCAR.

Moreover, the findings from this study add further understanding to the interrelationship between space, race, and sport. Little inquiry has been conducted on how sporting spaces are racialized, which is a gap that this study sought to address. While scholars within the sociology of sport and sport studies more broadly have attempted to engage with spatial theorizations of sporting spaces, few examinations exist on sporting spaces as dynamic and ongoing producers of spatial practices and relations as informed by race [52]. Additionally, despite the fact that Fusco's study has been cited within scholarship on racial identity development and racialized experiences, it has largely been done so in reference to the fact that whiteness as a discursive force was examined within a sporting context. By examining how and in what ways racially marginalized, minoritized, and disenfranchised individuals experience encounters with covert and overt forms of racism in a given space, "we learn that race is produced by space, that it takes places for racism to take place" [4] (p. 5). As such, it can asserted that existing spatialized patterns serve to racially structure spaces, the impetus of which is to simultaneously uphold the historicized privileges of Whites and deny the racialized realities of Blacks. This necessitated the move to not only re-engage with the racialization of sporting spaces, but to "engage the ways whiteness operates in, and on, the subjects and spaces of sport" [52] (p. 285). Likewise, a more nuanced, complete consideration of anti-racist praxis for sporting organizations and pertinent stakeholders requires the continued assessment of whether sporting organizations have succeeded in what they set out to address in their proclaimed anti-racist efforts. In particular, explicit focus must be placed on how NASCAR—an organization with attachments to a conservative, White cultural nationalism and brand of reactionary racial politics—has attempted to expand beyond its Southern roots and distance itself from these attachments in recent years. Thus, the intention for this study was to curate a merger of these understandings of space, race, and sport so as to move toward a more narrowed direction for the study of racial ideology and how it reproduces socio-cultural meaning making processes in the historically (and contemporary) White space of NASCAR—the very nature of which may encourage NASCAR, as an organizing body, to embrace actionable knowledge in the name of intentioned inclusivity and racial justice.

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