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Making Space and Place for African American Women at Predominately White Institutions

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MAKING SPACE AND PLACE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AT PWI'S

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Nubia Hewitt

August 2021

MAKING SPACE AND PLACE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AT PWI'S

By

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Approved June 25, 2021

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ABSTRACT

MAKING SPACE AND PLACE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AT PWI'S

By

Nubia Hewitt

August 2021

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Darius Prier

This research study utilized a critical race studies approach to explore the lived experiences of African American women undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution. The purpose of this study is to investigate challenges experienced by African American women at these institutions, and the support they require in order to develop a sense of belonging at these institutions.

Five African American women undergraduate students from Incline University (pseudonym) were selected to participate in this research study using criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed through an interruptive phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 1990, 2002; Willig, 2001). The outcomes of the study suggest (1) women require a support system; (2) their experiences regarding racism and discrimination on

campus have a negative impact; and (3) barriers across peer and faculty interactions make

it difficult when finding support on campus.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Zhuri. As I was exploring the lives of Black women, I gave birth to you. You motivate me to fight for a more inclusive world where you are treated equally to your peers. You've inspired me in more ways than one and I cannot thank you enough.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First, thank you God. Without you, nothing is possible.

I would like to thank my husband, Dwayne. Thank you for supporting and loving me throughout this journey. For the past 7 years, you've heard me discuss what improvements I want to make in higher education. You've remained my thought partner and life partner. I love you endlessly.

To my mother, Allison, the strongest woman I've ever known. Thank you! I've watched you selflessly make such a difference in my world and so many others. You deserve all the thanks in the world, and I would not be the woman I am today without your love, guidance, and understanding. To my four amazing brothers, I love you. Thank you for all the love and inspiration.

Dr. Darius Prier, thank you for exposing me to the impact that I can make in higher education. Thank you for pushing me to dive a little deeper and never settle. I've grown a lot throughout this journey, and I am so grateful to you.

Dr. Alydia Thomas, thank you for your labor of love. Since the day I met you, you've challenged me. You always lifted me up and believed in me. You never let me quit or even doubt myself. I owe you a tremendous amount of gratitude for the doors you've opened for me and other Black girls without a voice.

Dr. Connie Moss, thank you for seeing my potential. You never let me use my age or inexperience as a way out but instead a way through. You turned my potential into strength. This is the kind of strength I pray to instill in my daughter and other young Black girls.

Dr. Gretchen Generett, thank you for your time and dedication. You started this journey with me and always supported me. Thank you for all your dedication to Black women. We are because you were what we desired to be.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Rationale of Study

African American women are increasing their presence at predominantly White institutions (Jones-DeWeever, 2014). By 2010, Black women earned 66% of all bachelor's degrees attained by African Americans (Jones-DeWeever, 2014). However, less than 19% of African American women complete a 4-year degree program within 4 years (Shapiro et. Al., 2017; Astin, Tsui & Avalos, 1996). Harper (2013) explained that prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many universities and colleges excluded African American students from enrollment. Despite the fact that African Americans have been enrolled into predominantly White institutions for over 50 years, African American women still experience racism and isolation (Harper, 2013). Howard-Hamilton (2003) observed that Black women college students experience additional stressors of racism and sexism while on campus. Howard-Hamilton (2003) referred to this as "double oppression" (p.19).

Zamani (2003) stated that, "being female and African American places African American women at the confluence of two forms of oppression" (p.7). Zamani (2003) noted that "given the complex intersection of race and gender, more attention should be paid to the educational, social, and political positions of African American women in post-secondary education" (p.6). The lack of support for these students has negative implications and impact their overall experience.

Tinto (2005) believed that a student's success requires institutional commitment and support. Additionally, Tinto goes on to explain the importance of an investment in resources for its students. Overall, a student's college experience and satisfaction is impacted by factors inside and outside the classroom (Astin, 1984, Tinto, 1993). By improving African American women's sense of belonging, these supports may increase their academic success and inclusion on campus.

As a Black woman who is also an educational leader at a predominantly White institution in an urban setting, I believe my experience as an administrator and student has shown me how race and gender biases contribute to feelings of isolation, racism, and sense of belonging on campus. Black women share a different experience than their White counterparts while living on campus. My research study seeks to gain a better understanding of the types of support Black women need in relation to their overall experiences.

This study will examine and interpret African American women's experiences at a PWI as a means of understanding gaps and opportunities for the potential improvement of said students' sense of belonging in the future. Additionally, this research seeks to better understand and improve the social experiences of African American women on a predominately White campus. Improving the campus resources and types of support for African American women will create a strong sense of community on campus and develop a more inclusive campus climate.

In order to understand these women's experiences, counter-narratives will be used to share their stories. Counter-narratives are used to share stories from silenced voices (Stake, 2003; Creswell, 2013). Counter-narratives are a tool for minority students to counter their majority peers campus life's experiences. Campus resources are not equally created to address *all* their students' needs.

The participants for this study were African American women undergraduate students who live on a predominantly White institution campus. This factor accounted for authenticity of the study. Additionally, the participants were enrolled as a sophomore, junior, or senior to provide perspective for their lived experience. These stories were obtained as data for my qualitative research study.

2

African Americans have been marginalized and rarely have the opportunity to share our narratives. However, we have held discussions amongst one another. The conversations had many implications and encouraged me to further investigate. By understanding these women's stories, educational leadership can make more informed decisions about how to provide the best resources for these undergraduate students. Through this research, I explored African American undergraduate students' experiences. Although the majority of educational leaders at PWI's are White, this research can help them make informed decisions about how to build a diverse community.

Critical race theory (CRT) is used to explore the lived experience of African American people. Critical race theory analyzes race as an essential factor in a student's experience at a PWI. This framework accounts for the plight of African American women into higher education and outlines the various discrimination methods that colleges and universities place on these students.

I explored the silenced voices of Black women; and listened to their accounts of racism, sexism, and micro-aggressions while on campus. The research will help staff and administrators support Black women on campus through innovation and inquiry. Strayhorn (2012) and Baker (2013) found that when faculty, staff, and administrators support African American students they improve the student's experience, academic success, and sense of belonging.

Definitions

This section of the paper will provide definitions for several terms that will be used throughout. The following terms have been defined as they relate to this study and the overall experience of the participants.

African American/Black: Ethnically and racially identifying terms can be challenging to use and define (Newport, 2007). In this context/study, the terms *African American* and *Black* will be used interchangeably to describe the participants of the study. An African American woman can be defined as, "a black person born in the United States to at least one generation of a U.S. born Black parent or more, the descendant of enslaved Africans brought to colonial American soil" (Black, 2014, p.548).

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): An institution of higher education in which White students account for more than half (50%) of the overall student population.

Sense of belonging: Many definitions exist to define sense of belonging. In regard to this study, Strayhorn (2012) describes sense of belonging as the feeling of being respected, accepted, and part of a group setting.

Black Feminist Theory: "Black feminist theory incorporates ideas produced by Black women who clarify a standpoint of and for Black women" (Collins, 2004, p. 103). Black feminist theory will be used to explain the experience had by the African American women on campus.

Race: a social construct that synthetically divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): Critical race theory is defined by Tierney (1993) as "an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation" (p.4). CRT will be used to explain how race and racism impact the experiences of the African American women at PWIs.

The Multicultural Affairs Office is a pseudonym that will be used throughout the research study.

Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspectives

Prior to the case of Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, (Supreme Court of the United States, 1954) African American students could not attend the same school as their White counterparts (Fleming, 1985). This Supreme Court case allowed Black students to attend historically White institutions. Once Black students were able to attend the White schools, there were other issues that went unaddressed. In order for Black students to be successful at White institutions, they need to be equipped with the same resources as White students. Black students were not equipped with the resources to be successful at White institutions. Fleming (1985) explained that the increase in Black enrollment was due to Black students exercising their right to attend White institutions. However, the Black students were not aware of the various aspects of the transition.

African American students face different race disparities than any other group due our ancestral history of slavery and oppression in the United States. Administrators, faculty, and staff must make an intentional effort to support African American women students on campus. Harper (2013) explained how African American students have been fighting for equity and inclusion in higher education since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Since 1964, African American students made the adjustment into White institutions and White culture. The challenges with Black students into White spaces is that the spaces were not designed for Black students. These spaces were not created with Black students in mind; therefore, they do not have the appropriate resources.

In order to feel a sense of community on campus, African American women must have a mentor or someone to support them along their academic, collegiate journey. Merriam-Webster (2015) defines a mentor as someone who "teaches or gives advice or guidance to someone"

(p.1). Furthermore, a mentor can be anyone who guides an individual. Subsequently, African American women are more likely to relate to another African American woman. The relationship can be more meaningful based on relatable life experiences and shared backgrounds (Vickers, 2014).

The offices geared towards supporting Black women are limited with support. The multicultural affairs offices at predominantly White institutions are created office(s) to support minority students (Patton, 2016). Patton (2016) goes on to explain that the office's purpose is to address various adversities for the minority population. The multicultural affairs office has the ability to create a welcoming, inclusive community while on campus. Administrators who work within these offices play a major role in a student's development and their overall perspective of the campus community. The staff are able to refer the students to support services that can address feelings of isolation, support, and alienation that can be systematic (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014, McClain & Perry, 2017). However, the main concern is with the support on campus and how the lack of support affects the student's experience.

This qualitative study will assess the students' experiences with support through counter narratives. Black women have a unique experience while enrolled at a predominantly White institution. Grant (2012) outlines the various reasons for the negative experiences had by Black women: They encounter inequality, unfair treatment, misjudgment, isolation, and marginality in PWIs. Their intellectual capabilities are often doubted, and their research interests are often questioned or neglected. When they attempt to claim the same prerogatives as granted to their White peers (such as researching and writing about this of personal and cultural relevance to them) they are often discouraged, silenced, and sometimes dismissed (Grant, 2012 p.104).

Black women struggle to find social groups, clubs, and interactions on campus. Majority of the groups were made to support White female students and do not provide an inclusive setting for Black women. Students are tasked with finding or creating their own spaces to socialize and gain support. Although there are nationally recognized groups such as the Black Student Union, it does not cover all the social opportunities on campus. Patton (2016) indicated that the resources on campus for African American students are limited to the offices on campus that are designated for serving multicultural students.

Several researchers have written about student experiences at predominantly White institutions and acknowledge the institutionalized racism that exist within higher education (Harper, 2012). The literature outlines the foundations of institutionalized racism and the many challenges faced by African American women. Henry (2008) suggested that Black women students in higher education institutions are more likely to have issues with social interactions on campus and are also more "at risk for depression, anxiety, anger, shame and despair" (Henry, 2008, p.20) which is attributed to the overwhelming need to protect their identity and "promote their culture" (Bartman, 2015, p.5; Thomas, 2017).

Local Contextual Perspective

Towards the end of my freshman year, I contacted the local NAACP chapter. Historically, this particular university did not have a relationship with the local NAACP office. However, it was imperative to form this relationship as a resource for African American students. I attended the monthly meeting as a campus ambassador and the multicultural club attended their annual spring awards ceremony. During the monthly meetings, we shared ideas with one another and leveraged the information learned during our time as executive officers for clubs on campus.

Forming relationships on campus with my White peers was inconsistent and happened on a case-by-case basis. I found myself code switching often as an effort to be accepted in classroom settings and to join study groups. I exchanged my self-respect for acceptance.

My experiences as an African American woman at a PWI motivated me to investigate the experience of other black women who attend PWI's and investigate their lived experiences. During my time enrolled in a predominantly White institution, I experienced racism, microaggressions, and macroaggressions.

During my first year of college, I attended a club fair. As a freshman, I was eager to meet new people and join organizations that aligned with my purpose. However, I was sadly confronted with only one club that was culturally relevant. The club was called the "Multicultural Club," which is essentially a club for all minority students. However, the club consisted of only African American students. I felt confused as to why the college only offered a blanket club to "address" all minority and marginalized communities.

I've always been proud of my heritage and I knew I wanted to be part of this club. Upon signing up for the Multicultural Club, I met the executive board which was made up of upperclassmen. They welcomed me with open arms, and I was relieved. After attending the first club meeting, I did not believe this club was doing enough to support the African American students and their overall success on campus. After all, the goal of matriculating into college is to graduate. The club was a safe haven for students, but the feelings of isolation were still present. The support of my peers made me feel comfortable but when our meetings ended the isolation continued.

In an effort to increase our presence on campus and the surrounding community, I sought out leadership. The director for multicultural affairs was extremely helpful. He was an African

American male who attended Incline University and was an alumni member. One of his responsibilities was to advise the Multicultural Affairs Club. I created a weekly meeting with him to discuss ideas I had for the club because I was not taken seriously as a freshman. The upperclassmen asserted their leadership power towards younger members of the club and did not allow the lowerclassman to insert our opinions.

These aforementioned feelings of neglect converted into motivation and determination. The determination to expand our presence on campus allowed me to reflect on various ways to expose ourselves to more students as a means to acculturate into the campus community. The majority of the White students walked past our table and did not acknowledge our club. The Multicultural Affairs Club used fairs to provide information about our upcoming events.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Dinner and the Soul Food Dinner were two of the most well-attended events on campus. However, my freshman year there were approximately 35 people at the dinner. By my senior year, the MLK Day dinner expanded to over 200 attendees. The Soul Food Dinner was an opportunity to showcase southern comfort food as a means to share a part of a culture with the campus community. We petitioned for the Soul Food Dinner to be used for a meal swipe option for students. Therefore, students would not have to spend additional funds. Our goal was to make the dinner as inclusive as possible. Additionally, the tradition is for an executive board member to invite their family to cook in the University's kitchen. This provided an opportunity for the club to bond, cook, and learn from our elders. The Soul Food Dinner was a staple for the Multicultural Affairs Club. The attendees ranged from students, community members, staff, and faculty.

My relationships with my White peers was challenging in regard to respect, understanding, and overall friendship. I spent a lot of time explaining my perspective, trying to

be understood, and feeling the pressure to answer questions for the entire Black community. At the time, I failed to realize what was happening to me and the impact of these conversations. Most of the time I felt exhausted and overwhelmed by the pressures placed on me while living on campus.

Micro and macroaggressions were present in the classroom, the on-campus living community, and the surrounding campus community. I did not feel comfortable, included, or wanted. I forced myself to join many campus clubs and organizations to make new friends and feel part of the community. I was not always well received by the groups. I even had one group on campus tell me that their organization would not be beneficial for me and that I should "reconsider joining". As a freshman in a new community, I felt overwhelmed by the academic pressures of a new institution, however, the social burden was just as heavy.

As a student, I accepted the responsibility to answer the majority of the questions asked by my White counterparts. I felt the need to enlighten the White on-campus community by explaining why I wrap my hair at night, the type of shampoo/conditioner I used, why I may not agree with all the democratic viewpoints, and my father's commitment to our country by serving in the United States' Navy. These are some of the times I can remember holding powerful conversations with my White peers and feeling the desire to be understood and their "openness" and willingness to learn.

I also learned the importance of networking within the community and spreading the message of diversity as widely as possible. My message was, "Black people are not a threat. We are commonly misunderstood and falsely accused." Our problem was not our message, it was raising awareness to the campus community as well as the local community off campus.

Once I transitioned to an administrative role for a PWI, I observed similar behaviors and witnessed similar encounters with the African American women on campus. I became an administrator at a different PWI than my alma mater. I attended a PWI in a rural area and now work in an urban setting. However, I observed similar interactions in both communities. My role allowed me to work directly with the African American undergraduate women on campus as they attempted to socially acculturate themselves on campus. Unfortunately, these women faced many challenges and were often not supported by their White counterparts in their efforts to create a more inclusive community.

The desire to be understood, be a part, and connect with others motivated these women to sponsor a social gathering that resonated with their needs. All the social events were open to the campus community. The events were opportunities to connect with the campus community and teach others about themselves. The lack of attendance sent a strong message to the women and created more distance between the African American women and their White peers. Majority of events and organizations on campus are designed to address White issues, problems, and lifestyles. The African American women are forced to create their own spaces when the University's administration fails to address their needs.

Leadership Perspective

As an educational leader at a PWI, my responsibility is to support and develop the students. More specifically, I have a responsibility to the African American women on campus to center their voices and guide them through their college journey. I was silenced as a African American female undergraduate student and I want to break this cycle for other Black female students. By enabling these students to talk and share their experience, I will provide an opportunity of improvement.

At Incline University, there are 314 African American undergraduate students out of a total population of 5,889 undergraduate students, which accounts for 5.33%. African American women account for 156 of the 314 which is 49.6% of the total population of African American undergraduate students. The small population of African American women at Incline University limit their exposure on campus and decrease the chances of their issues being addressed. Prior to being an administrator, I was a first-generation African American woman undergraduate student at a predominantly White institution. I shared experiences with these women and use that as motivation to investigate issues of support on campus.

In my current role as a student development graduate assistant, I support 22 undergraduate students with their community partnerships and co-teach a community engagement course. I work closely with my students and meet with them bi-weekly to check on their experiences while working in the community. Naturally, some students want to discuss their personal life or their challenges while enrolled at Incline University. As I listen to their plights to graduation, I realized that African American women have similar struggles with their sense of belonging and isolation on campus. They share stories of micro-aggressions, feeling isolated, and having limited social options. When the women share their experiences with me it encourages me to fight for them.

Statement of Problem

Higher education institutions were created for White men. Historically, the student and faculty populations were all White men (Linley, 2018). Due to college spaces being created for White men to teach and learn, other racial and gender populations were not permitted to join the community. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 allowed African American students to attend White schools. Although African American students were legally allowed to enroll in these institutions,

this did not mean the students would be welcomed nor did the institutions provide resources for Black students. The institutions were designed for White students and did not account for the African American students who need welcoming into the new community. Johnson (2015) reported that Black women students' success is determined by academic success *and* other supports.

Higher education institutions in the United States are increasing their population of African American women. Amongst African Americans, Black women account for two-third of the bachelor's degrees (Jones-DeWeever, 2014). Black women have a unique experience within higher education institutions.

This study will expose the current conditions and focus primarily on the students' sense of belonging and inclusivity on campus.

As a group, Black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other racial group. Occupying such a position, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist, and classist oppression. (hooks, 1984, p.14)

African American women have a difficult social adjustment as the minority. These women can be described as feeling like "others" while fighting to be part of the campus community. Often times, Black women become victims to implicit biases and micro-aggressions from staff, faculty, and their peers on campus. Institutions must prioritize Black women in order to retain them. The overall college experience is different for Black women compared to their White counterparts. These changes impact a student's ability to adjust to their new community and may lead to students feeling more marginalized.

African American women are at a disadvantage than other students. Predominately White institutions are filled with students, faculty and administration that do not look like them. The amount of support for Black women is less than White students. Many Black women face various challenges while making the transition into post-secondary education.

Various authors write about the many challenges that Black women face at PWIs. These challenges affect the students' social interactions. Additionally, Black women face the intersection of race and gender which can compound their disposition at PWIs (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016). Strayhorn (2012) described sense of belonging as "a critical dimension of success at college. It can affect a student's degree of academic adjustment, achievement, aspirations, or even whether a student stays in school." (p.1).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore challenges experienced by African American women. Higher education institutions around the United States struggle to retain African American women. This study strives to understand the causes. Higher education is dominated by White men which is why their sense of belonging, graduation rate, and retention is the highest amongst all students. African American women deserve to have the proper resources and supports to thrive while at a PWI.

Linley (2018) discussed how higher education institutions were intended to support White students and their experiences. However, the racial experience for African American women include inequality, adversity, and racial injustices. The higher education system has supported Whites, more specifically White men, for over 200 years. For a system built to support the majority student, it will take more resources to support Black women who are uniquely placed within 2 different minority groups.

14

Research Questions

1. How do African American women undergraduate students make sense of their support at PWI's?

2. What does it mean to engage African American women undergraduate students at PWI's?

3. How does race and gender impact sense of belonging for African American women at PWI's?

For this study, African American women will be asked to share narratives about their experience while attending a predominately White institution. This study will provide further insight into the challenges experienced by African American women. Additionally, this study will add to the current literature around African American women in higher education and their sense of belonging while on campus.

The overall objective is to evaluate African American women's experience. One of the goals is to provide a platform for these students to share their stories. Another goal is to connect with their peers and assess any shared experiences. Unless the women go out of their way to connect, they are not given many opportunities to discuss the challenges while living on campus. The academic rigor is a challenge faced by most students but when it is compounded with the social pressures, the intensity is increased. If African American women felt an increase sense of belonging, they would have a greater chance of academic success.

My intention is for this research to improve African American women's experience on campus and support their academic success. Ideally, this study will add to the existing literature that centers African American women's experiences at PWI, higher education institutions. Following this study, I would like to share the knowledge with staff, faculty, and administrators

who want to improve the lives of their students as well as address institutional improvement towards these women.

Significance of Study

Higher education institutions have the responsibility to support African American women students. These institutions should be equipped to educate these women and support their needs. The experiences of African American women need to be captured in order to effectively support these students while they are enrolled at a PWI. Since PWI's market and recruit Black women, they need to provide resources to make these students feel part of the community. African American women need to be shown value and appreciation while on campus. Campus climate plays a key role in student's perception of campus and overall retention.

This study will aid in the University personnel to better understand the lived experiences of African American women as to better serve them. I will capture the narratives from these students and collect their stories as data. This research can be used as a tool to improve campus climate and culture to be more inclusive for Black women. Despite their best efforts, predominately White institutions are still not meeting the needs of their Black female students. As a minority group on campus, African American women face various adversities. If PWI's fail to address Black women, they will continue to be marginalized and have a more difficult time acculturating into the campus culture. The results of this study will be used to help African American women.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an introduction into this qualitative research study. The purpose of this study is to explore challenges experienced by African American women. This chapter outlines the significance of the study and the methodology. Additionally, this section includes

definitions for relevant terms in the study, a detailed overview of the study, and contextual evidence.

Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant literature that surrounds African American women's plight into higher education. Chapter 3 will outline the methodology for this study. I will use qualitative research through a case study of semi-structured interviews of 5 participants. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, all data collection will be conducted virtually; semi-structured interviews will be completed over Zoom meetings. The theoretical frameworks in this study is critical race theory and Black feminist thought. The implications from this study can be used towards campus culture and climate improvement towards Black women.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature related to the experiences of undergraduate African American females at a predominantly White Institution in an urban setting. The experiences of Black women who attend predominantly White institutions for undergraduate studies varies from institution to institution. However, majority of students report negative on-campus experiences (Grant, 2012). Understanding the dilemma of African American women will first be examined through the history of higher education in the United States (Edsall & Edsall, 1992). In particular, there will be an emphasis on understanding the institutional campus climate for Black female students.

The first section will be a brief historical overview of the experiences of Black women at predominantly White institutions. The experiences of African American females are observed in relation to the institutional climate and social support on campus. These key factors play a significant role in the overall experience of Black women on campus during their time at a higher education institution.

While observing the experiences of Black women, it is important to identify the major factors that impact their experiences. Two of the identified factors are institutional support and climate within the institution (Einarson & Matier; 2005; Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto,1997). The experiences will include societal challenges faced by Black women and their encounters within the United States education system. The rest of the chapter will outline the controversy about race, identity development, and the historical context that applies to the African American female experience in higher education. While observing the experiences of Black female

students have on White college campuses, a variety of factors are involved as it relates to displacement, identify formation, and retention.

The History of Black Students Matriculation into Predominantly White Institutions

The following section transitions nicely into the specific experiences of African American women at PWI's. The Thirteenth Amendment in 1868 declared Blacks in the United States as citizens and later in the 1980's the term "African American" was coined by Reverend Jesse Jackson (Hays & Erford, 2014). The 1892 incident of Homer Plessy refusing to sit in the cart for Blacks on a passenger train formed one of the most controversial and transformative moments in United States history for African American citizens and inclusive practices.

In 1896, Plessy versus Ferguson was the monumental court case that established separate public facilities for Black and White persons. The case deemed racial segregation in public facilities as unconstitutional and tokened the phrase "separate-but-equal". Separate but equal meant all the public facilities had to be equal in quality for both African Americans and Whites. The case of Brown versus Board of Education of 1954 began the journey of African American students at predominantly White institutions. In 1954, the Supreme Court case of Brown versus Board was the iconic case that legally allowed Black children to attend a White school and abolished segregation in the United States public school system.

Following Brown versus Board of Topeka, (Supreme Court of the United States, 1954) there was a significant decrease in Black students attending historically Black colleges and universities. However, the enrollment of Black students into PWI's increased (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Fleming, 1985; Allen, Epps, and Haniff, 1991). Fleming's (1985) reasoning for this increase of Black enrollment is due to Black students exercising their right to attend White institutions. Whereas, other authors such as Gurin and Epps describe this shift as a direct link to

the proximity of White institutions and Black communities. Another reason for the increase of Black students into PWI's is the financial support White institutions can offer to Black students. After further analysis, Fleming (1985) suggests that Black students adjust different at a PWI versus Blacks who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU).

Despite the financial support and accessibility to PWI's, the experience of Black students who attend these institutions is not without hardship and dissatisfaction. Black students face many challenges while attending White institutions. The factors focused on are campus climate, level of engagement, involvement and integration (Flowers, 2004; Harper & Quaye; 2009; Johnson, 2005) and identity development (Williams, Brown, & Williams, 2020). These factors influence retention and success (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Furr & Elling, 2002; Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, & Green, 2004; Seidman, 2005). The role of gender is often not associated with the experiences of African American students. Subsequently, there is a lack of research on examining the difference amongst race and gender on college campuses.

Jacqueline Fleming and Walter Allen (1989) conducted exploratory research at different institutions and discovered the following: Black women become less assertive when they are educated with men; Black women gain some social assertiveness skills in Black colleges, but not in White colleges where Black men are fewer in number; and Black women often suffer from "emotional pain," social isolation, or aroused fears about their competence, especially at predominately White institutions.

According to Nettles' (1988) research on African American students in higher education, it is evident that African Americans show significantly lower levels of adjustment and performance at predominantly White institutions due to lack of resources and lower economic statuses within their upbringing. Subsequently, Black students on White campuses are seen as

similarly vulnerable, are less likely to fit in, feel alienated, and adjust poorly to PWI campuses (Stage & Hossler, 1989). This kind of data is vital to understanding the complex experiences of Black women at predominantly White institutions. More recent authors' current literature suggests that Black students encounter issues of race and racism in predominantly White institutions (Cabrera, Amaury, Terenzini, Pascarella, Hagedom, 1999, Delgado & Stelfanic, 1998).

Yolanda Moses (1989) wrote that Black women are treated differently than White men, White women, and Black men. Black women had an increase feeling of isolation, hostility, indifference, and even a lack of understanding of their own experience. Jacqueline Fleming (1989) found within her study of Black male and female students at PWI's, that overt and covert racism in faculty and student relationships creates a climate of hostility and rejection in addition to a lasting psychological damage.

Discrepancies between rates of academic preparation and college retention between African American and White students at PWIs emerged from initiatives that aimed to support and prepare Black students who attend PWIs (Levin & Levin, 1991). However, later studies challenged the notion that insufficient academic preparation is the main reason for Black students' low achievement and retention at PWIs (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Sedlacek, 1987).

Walter Allen's National Study of Black College Students is one of the most cited and extensive studies on African American students at predominantly White institutions (PWI's) and historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's). The data from the study was collected from over 2500 students at sixteen institutions, eight PWI's and eight HBCU's (Allen, Epps, and & Haniff, 1991). The reports consisted of a greater representation of female students and

reported observed gender differences. Allen and co. recognized the limited information offered by Black women due to its "lacking in the highly sensitive data needed to understand the complexities of Black women's lives at these universities" (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991, p.253).

Historical Context of African American Women in College

Understanding the role of a Black women on a predominantly White campus requires a historical overview of the Black women's role in society. African American women are placed in a unique situation as they are members of two minority groups. By holding membership in two marginalized groups, African American women often times report feeling isolated and invisible. According to *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2018), African American women were not permitted to a formal education until 1835 when the first female student was admitted at Oberlin College in Ohio. In 1862, Mary Jane Patterson earned a Bachelor of Arts from Oberlin, becoming the first African American woman to earn a degree from an American college.

Chamberlain (1991) wrote "women first gained entry to institutions of higher education in the United States when Oberlin College admitted female students in 1837- more than 200 years after Harvard College was founded for the education of young men" (p.3). Lucy Session was the first Black woman to earn a literary degree from Oberlin College in 1850, making her the first African American woman to earn a college degree. During this time, a literary degree was considered an equivalent to a bachelor's degree. Following Lucy Session was Mary Jane Patterson who earned a Bachelor of Arts, making her the first black women to receive an official bachelor's degree in the United States (Littlefield, 1997, p. 165). Later in 1869, Fanny Jackson Coppin was named principal of the Institute of Colored Youth in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, making her the first Black female to lead a higher education institution (Littlefield, 1997, p. 166).

By 1891, there were a total of 30 African American women who obtained baccalaureate degrees (Perkins, 1983).

World War II changed the higher education system. Upon the conclusion of World War II and the return home, Black troops were not given the same treatment as their White colleagues (Fleming, 1985). The creation of the G.I. Bill, a college education funding program, provided federal financial support for veterans who want to pursue a college education (Fleming, 1985). Due to racial segregation at a predominately White institution in the south, all Black troops had to attend historically Black colleges and universities (Haynes, p.13). The G.I. Bill failed to assist HBCU's with their on-campus facilities; due to the overpopulated campuses, the facilities were not maintained (Fleming, 1985).

Historical Black colleges and universities created educational programs that targeted Black students. Prior to Oberlin College, many African American students attended colleges in the southern states. In the late nineteenth century, there was an increase in the number of Black women who attended college in the northern states of the United States (Evan, 2007). The Civil War began a new era for education and women's rights. Prior to the Civil War, White women and African Americans were excluded from attending higher education institutions. Historically, African American women have been preceded by White men, White women, and African American men, resulting in the perception of less significance and position in society (Zamani, 2003).

The ending of the Civil War opened a plethora of educational opportunities for Black students. From 1865 through 1880, over 30 American colleges and universities created programs that were specific to adapting to the increase number of African American students who wanted to purse a college degree. Several larger institutions voluntarily offered admission to interested

Black students including West Virginia University and the University of Arkansas (Peterson et al. 1978). These higher education institutions offered hope to the newly freed slaves and more access to the United States educational system.

Prior to full participation on campus, Black students attended class at an extension center. In 1963, Laura Marie Leary became the first Black student enrolled on-campus in a tradition session of undergraduate courses; she graduated in 1966 (Bratton, 1986). Southern universities and colleges began to integrate beginning in 1962; major institutions such as University of Mississippi, University of Alabama, and University of Georgia opened their doors to African American students (Bratton, 1986). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 desegregated all American colleges and universities. Due to PWI's admitting African American students, the number of African Americans at HBCU's decreased at a rapid rate. The decline was so large that it was reported as "the largest percentage decrease for any racial or ethnic group in the United States" (Hayes, 2015, p.14).

During the 1960s through the 1980s, the movement for social justice heavily influenced policies around admission practices to colleges and universities (The United states Department of Education, 1999). As described by Thomas and Jackson (2007), "the educational advancements of African American women have clearly afforded them opportunities to play a critical role in the empowerment of African American communities and 'uplift' of the African American race" (p. 368). In numerous ways, the shared stories and experiences illustrate the veracity of the belief shared by enslaved Africans in the United States that education would be the key to true and enduring freedom.

In 2012, African American women account for 12.7 % of the female population of the United States, however, held only 8.5% of the bachelor's degrees earned by women (Guerra,

2013). This data supports the notion that while African American women's participation in higher education is improving, it is not yet representative of the overall population. According to Garibaldi (2014), there are more than 800,000 African American women enrolled in a United States college campus than African American males. Further, Garibaldi wrote about the impacts of the "disproportions in male-female enrollments in college negatively impact students' interactions and social life on campus" (2004, p. 375).

In summary, African American women have persisted since the days of slavery in the United States to become exceptionally accomplished scholars and citizens. African American females have consistently represented the largest non-White college enrolled student population (approximately 64%) in higher education and presently account for over 66% of earned degrees of the African American enrolled student body (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010).

Rosales and Person (2003) wrote that there are some institutions where enrollment of Black women is so low that there is no sense of community for these students on campus and therefore their identity development lacks appropriate cultural references. Due to the lack of study, it is challenging to fully depict the journey of a Black woman on a White campus. There is a need for further exploration and literature on this topic and expansion on Black women experiences in society, specifically on White campuses.

Black women managed to overcome challenges despite the various obstacles placed in their path. African American women continue to fight for equality and equity in United States educational system. There are still questions to explore as we continue along the journey. The majority of literature that discuss the experience of Black women view those experiences from a homogenous perspective without considerations to other identities of Black women.

The Impact of Mentorship

The populations at predominantly White institutions is evolving and these institutions must make a change in faculty and staff to reflect the diverse community. Due to the suspiciously low number of African American female faculty and staff at PWIs, students are less likely to have role models or mentors available to support them. Cross and Slater (2004) noted that based on a student's racial identity development, African American students may reject White mentors in an effort to immerse themselves in African American culture.

Feist-Price (2001) explored African American mentor perspectives at a predominantly White institution. These authors reported on the personal and professional pressures to go out of their way for African American students surpassed their energy and time needed to sustain mentorship. According to Feist-Price (2001), African American students sought out for African American faculty and staff because they felt more comfortable approaching them and vulnerable to their feedback compared to a White member of campus leadership.

Jolyn Dahlvig (2010) conducted a study at a religious based predominantly White institution with five African American women exploring their experiences while on campus. Dahlvig observed that all the women described "feeling different" than their White peers and other minority students on campus (p.389). This notion supports previous authors like Campbell and Campbell (2007), Sutton (2006), and Feist-Price (2001) that having the same cultural foundation supports positive mentoring relationships that can be helpful for the following reasons: (1) clear communication, (2) baseline understanding of circumstances, and (3) the feeling that someone has "been there" (p.389).

An important item to note is that all the women in the aforementioned study were heavily involved with different on campus groups as a means to feel included. However, the women still

reported a disconnect throughout campus. These women highlighted their feeling of disconnect from the campus community due to being Black women. Dahlvig concluded that racial identity development is an important element for black women to connect with their mentors and increase their connection to others on campus.

Identity Development

History

Erik Erikson developed and wrote about identity in 1958. His most famous novel is Identity: Youth and Crisis, where he discussed the identity development of youth into adulthood. The limitations of Erikson's work include identity discussed in the social environment context and on an individual basis versus minority group observations. During this time, African American students were attending separate schools than White students. Therefore, it was not reported on interactions in the educational community.

Erik Erikson (1966) acknowledged ethnicity in his identity development theory, however, he only included ethnicity within his "pseudo-speciation." "Pseudo-speciation refers to the claim that cultural differences cause humans to separate into different social groups, with different language, dress, customs, etc. These cultural differences are analogous to the formation of different biological species" (Erikson, 1966, p.153). Erikson's explicit description of pseudo-speciation describes it as "promoting cooperation within social groups, overpowering the selfish interests of individuals in favor of collective interests" (Erikson, 1966, p. 153). One of the limitations noted by Erikson within pseudo speciation is that "it inhibits cooperation between groups, and indeed, it fosters conflict and mistrust" (1966, p.153). Identity development is comprised of several elements that affect cooperation and overall identity.

Later in 1968, Erikson's research on adolescent identity development *still* did not include ethnicity or race. Erikson's concept of identity development became a foundational construct for adolescent development. Identity is described as a "psychosocial construct involving the creation of a sense of sameness and continuity, a unity of personality achieved through a process of crisis and commitment (Phinney et al. 1987)". Culture plays a major role within identity development; however, other major factors need to be included in one's identity. Moreover, other researchers believed race, or ethnicity was an important factor in examining identity.

Jean S. Phinney and Linda Line Alipuria were among the group of researchers who valued race as a contributing factor in defining one's identity. They examined the importance of ethnicity as an identity factor and the relationship between ethnicity and self-esteem. Phinney and Alipuria distributed questionnaires to 196 male and female urban college students from three different minority groups; African American, Mexican-American, Asian-American and a comparison White group. The exploration of ethnic identity has been significantly higher for minority ethnic groups versus majority ethnic groups regarding college students. The findings included an exploration of ethnic identity issues and was significantly higher among minority groups, compared to the majority group. This means minority students reported their identity to be a key factor in developing their identity on a college campus. Conclusively, minority groups reported that their ethnicity is just as important as any other observable factor and contributes to their identity. Beginning in childhood, a girl starts to develop her identity.

During childhood girls have a strong since of self-identity; however, once the girls enter adolescence their sense of self-identity is limited by gender roles (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). The strong messages given by adults to the young women destroy self-confidence and weakens self-identity. In order to be accepted by others, women were self-silenced and refrained from

sharing their knowledge (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). As a woman, you are silenced, as a *minority* woman, you face a number of other contributing challenges.

Fordham (1990) found that their understanding of self-silence was a strategy to become more successful. Fordham (1990) observed a group of academically successful African American girls and found that their understanding of self-silence was a strategy to become more successful. The Black girls practiced silence to show an act of defiance against the low expectations placed upon these girls by the school's administration. The low expectations placed upon Black students created resiliency and persistency amongst the students and motivated them in a powerful way (Way, 1995). The silence was used as a protest tactic against the low expectation that they felt were placed on them by the school's faculty and staff.

Jackson (1998) investigated the correlation between race and gender and gender and self-concept of African American women at HBCU's and PWI's. Jackson's findings showed that Black women's self-perception is heavily influenced by the gender and racial structure of the institution. She identified three themes from her study: consciousness, struggle, and problem. Jackson examined that Black women at PWI's struggle more due to the limited support on campus as well as feeling burdened by the pressure to please others and prove themselves.

For African American women, the struggle with identity begins prior to enrolling into a higher education institution. Jackson (2008) discovered that in her study of 18-26-year-old Black women, they form identities from their childhood in various environments such as school, community, and family as significant indicators of identity development. Black women experiences are formed through an individual identity process that becomes the foundation of the negative experiences (Jackson, 2008; Hamilton, 2008).

Identity development within college campuses has been explored and discussed since the civil rights movement and the shift to White institutions allowing all races and ethnicities to enroll and earn degrees. The identity development of college students derived from several theories that observed the overall student characteristics. However, such theories of identity development evolved to include other aspects of one's identity. Cross's nigrescence theory describes racial differences as a significant factor of identity development (Worrell, Cross Jr., & Vandiver, 2001).

In 2011, Sengupta and Upton observed various themes within their literature review. They found that Black women had a lack of affirmation from the on-campus community including but not limited to faculty, staff, and other students. These women experience financial concerns that hinder their engagement on campus and with their academics. There was a lack of confidence in these women as well as doubt towards their academic abilities while attending a PWI (Segupta & Upton, 2011). By 2010, approximately 66% of African American female students held all bachelor's degrees earned by Black Americans; there is a significant number of Black women with a shared experience at these institutions (Jones-DeWeever, 2014). The challenges of being a Black woman vary from woman to woman based on culture and climate. For this exploration, there is a focus on Black women who attend predominantly White institutions.

Ruthellen Josselson (1996) wrote, "Identity is what we make of ourselves within a society that is making something of us", (p.28). She was aware that human development is not confined to self-perception, but society's depiction as well. Josselson (1996) observed and investigated the role of gender for women in college but did not discuss the intersection of

gender and race. In regard to the experiences of African American women, the intersectionality plays a major role in higher education.

Inevitably, every individual is a member of multiple groups, including their ethnic group. Ethnicity is a strong, salient part of one's identity. The challenges occur once a stereotype is placed on an ethnicity and that becomes society's way of identifying groups of people. Erikson (1966) notes that all individuals are members of the *homo sapiens* group and possess genetic integrity.

After entering into college, Black women still face similar identity formation issues. Current and past research has shown the multifaceted and unique nature of capturing the identity development for Black women, and further analysis is needed to be more intentional. (Shorter-Gooden & Washington; 1996, Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997; Howard-Vital, 1989; Chae, 2001; Watt, 2004).

Sense of Belonging

Nourishing the need for belongingness in educational environments takes on a greater importance during early adolescence. Students within that developmental period start going to peers and adults outside their family for guidance (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998) and their "sense of personal 'place' is still largely malleable and susceptible to influence in both positive and negative directions" (Goodenow, 1993, p.81). Membership within the school environment is an essential part of connection to the school, especially for "at-risk" students. If this need is not adequately satisfied in educational environments, students will look for other ways and people to get that satisfaction.

Bollen and Hoyle (1990) defined sense of belonging as "an individual's sense of identification or positioning in relation to a group within or to the college community that yield

cognitive and affective responses" (p.482). Bollen and Hoyle (1990) argue that without a fundamental sense of belonging, group members would not desire association with their peers. In an effort to support their description of sense of belonging, Bollen and Hoyle (1990) created the Perceived Cohesion Scale (PCS). The Perceived Cohesion Scale is a six-item measuring tool that is designed to reflect underlying scopes of cohesion.

Bollen and Hoyle (1990) created a Likert-scale survey, based on three items that would determine participant attitudes toward their sense of belonging and how they see themselves as members of a particular community. In addition, they obtained participant attitudes, regarding their feelings of morale by determining what they were enthusiastic and happy about within the school communities they were situated.The responses were captured on Likert-scale, ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

Bollen and Hoyle (1990) examined the stability within the study by using 102 students from a moderately small college and 110 residents of a midsized city. In an effort to analyze the study with a sociological perspective, Bollen and Hoyle (1990) chose a larger reference group that included a college in a city. The conclusion of the study, with regard to reliability and validity of the PCS, were limited with a large group. The recommendations were that PCS be adapted and tested with a smaller group.

Bollen and Hoyle (1990) adapted the PCS for small groups. The revised PCS focused on the psychometric properties within a small group. The small groups selected for this experiment were only for the purpose of the experiment. The modified PCS included a two-factor model which differs from the original PCS by specifying relationships between morale and belonging to be completely correlated (i.e. a 10 rating on the Likert scale). Furthermore, this model proposes that all six items on the scale are measuring the same concept.

Furthermore, Hurtado and Carter (1997) discuss sense of belonging within higher education based off Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) definition of sense of belonging. Hurtado and Carter (1997) stated that the student perception of an educational environment is based on their sense of belonging and attachment to the college and/or university. However, other authors such as Anant (1966) defined sense of belonging as "a person's perceived belief of indispensability within a social system and that he or she is recognized and accepted as a member of that community" (p.21). Anant believed that the sense of belonging was the missing theoretical link in understanding mental health with an emphasis on relationship and intersectional perspective. Sense of belonging has been studied by many authors as part of the social construct and it is mentioned in numerous theoretical frameworks.

Maslow (1954) identified belonging as a basic human need, ranking it third on his hierarchy of needs. Maslow goes on to explain how sense of belonging is a sense of connection and relationship. The need to belong is accompanied by love and includes intimate relationships such as family, friends, and work. In regard to education, Maslow (1971) contended that a humanitarian approach would develop people who are "stronger, healthier, and would take their own lives into their hands to a greater extent. With increased personal responsibility for one's personal life, and with a rational set of values to guide one's choosing, people would begin to actively change the society in which they live" (1971, p.195).

Maslow advocates students need to be shown that they are valued and respected in the classroom; the teacher must create a supportive environment. Terezini and Reason (2005) argued that student persistence should be considered with several parts which includes pre-college characteristics and experiences, peer environment, and organizational context. The majority of sense of belonging data and research in higher education is focused on the experience of racial

minority students finding their way through a higher education institution, however, the literature is limited.

Students must achieve a certain amount of sense of belonging to avoid negative academic consequences and experience (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Durkheim, 1951). The need to belong offers students' feeling about themselves, as well as their relationships with others in the educational setting (Booker, 2016). Research indicates that several urban African American students are disconnected from the school setting because of the cultural divide between students and education (Thompson, 2004).

Furthermore, studies steadily reveal that students who experience a sense of belonging in educational environments are more motivated, more engaged in school and classroom activities, and more dedicated to school (Osterman, 2000). Additionally, existing research implies that students who feel that they belong to learning environments report higher enjoyment, enthusiasm, happiness, interest, and more confidence in engaging in learning activities, whereas those who feel isolated report greater anxiety, boredom, frustration, and sadness during the academic engagement that directly affects academic performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

In regard to sense of belonging in higher education, Hurtado and Carter (1997) measure sense of belonging as a major contributing factor to students' attachment to the campus community. Their longitudinal study on college students focused on sense of belonging as it pertains to student persistence models. Hurtado and Carter describe a multidimensional construct of the perceived sense of belonging that they declare is "suited to understand a variety of collective affiliations, formed in large environments that can contribute to an individual's sense of belonging to the larger community" (1997, p. 328). Other scholars such as Maestas, Vaquera,

& Munoz Zehr (2007) argue feeling of perception are associated with group memberships which contribute to sense of belonging in a community.

According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Campus Life: In Search of Community*, Boyer (1990) outlined six principles that every college and university should ascribe to in an effort to make a community. Boyer 's (1990) principle five says "A college or university is a caring community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged" (p.47). This principle places the responsibility of creating an inclusive community on the institution; a place where all students can be part of the community.

Socialization amongst college students refers to the process in which students establish an understanding, norms, values, knowledge, and skills necessary to function within a given institutional context (Merton, 1957; Tinto, 1986, Weidman, 1987). Ancis et. Al (2000) reported that when minority students experience stress, they are more likely to perceive the campus climate negatively. Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) conducted a qualitative study to investigate cultural climate and stereotypes for African American students who reported sharing their racial campus experiences on campus. The African American students reported a belief that faculty and their White peers viewed Black students as "intellectually incapable" and "undeserving of university admission" (p.387). They believed they are incapable, so that affects the support they get by not allowing Black students to reach their full potential. The negative and inaccurate understanding of Black ability has consequences on the Black students.

Campus Climate

African American women have been enrolled in higher education for over a century, however, they are not adequately represented in the research literature (Moses, 1989). The

climate of a campus is defined as current perception and attitudes of students regarding issues of diversity on campus which includes personal campus experience and perceptions of institutional engagements (Rankin & Reason, 2005). The impact of sexism and racism towards Black women is rarely discussed, if at all. College must be aware of the needs of their Black female students and be supportive of their development.

Rankin and Reason's (2005) research suggested that perceptions of a supportive environment reinforce positive learning and social outcomes. In 1986, African American students were 86 percent of the total minority undergraduate enrollment in higher education institutions (Moses, 1989). Out of the 86 percent of Black students, 59.6 percent were female students, making them the majority of the Black population on campus.

Numerous authors have written about the challenges within campus climate and observed the correlation to African American student success at a predominantly White institution (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Fischer, 2007; Fleming J.,1985; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Lau, 2003; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999). Campus climate is defined as perceived attitudes, behaviors, and standards within a campus (Reason, 2005). Rankin and Reason (2005) explain negative experiences and perceptions on predominantly White campuses are more likely to occur for students of color. The findings showed that students of color who attended a PWI described feelings of being unwelcomed, uncomfortable, and being in a hostile learning environment.

Greer, Tawanda, and Chwalisz (2007) conducted a study on minority related stressors and the coping processes among African American college students. The study found that PWI's have a higher level of stress for African American students which can negatively impact their

academic performance. The authors suggest PWI's should evaluate their campuses in order to serve minority students which could potentially decrease the amount of minority stress.

In 1989, Yolanda Moses wrote about the experiences of black women on college campuses which included university culture for students, social life, intersection of racism and sexism, extra-curricular activities, and the students' choice of study. Moses (1989) found that "Black female students, faculty, and administrators do not perceive themselves and their concerns as integrated into the mission, goals and social structures of the college campus" (p.23). Black students who reported that campus climate was non-nurturing and uncaring expressed interest in leaving the institution; there is an increase of female students reporting the cold campus climate (Strayhorn, 2013, p. 121).

In 2010, Wei, Ku, and Yu-Hsin Liao reported on the minority stress and college persistence attitudes amongst minority students while observing campus climate as a mediator. The authors describe minority stress at a PWI as it relates to racist and discriminatory experiences, and conflicts with the campus culture while forming a social identity and developing meaningful connections with White students and faculty. Wei and colleagues (2010) reported that students of color may experience conflict within their own cultural group and can be perceived as "acting White" (p. 412) by their colleagues.

In addition to the pressures of minority students, the token syndrome plays a role on minority identity on White campuses. The "token" Syndrome "in higher education administration, as in society, the numerically dominant group controls the academy and its culture" (Moses, 1989, p. 21). To the majority group, the smaller group of minority students are viewed as "tokens". These individuals become representation of the entire ethnic group.

37

Higher education institutions foster creative thinking, advocacy, and activism. However, not all higher education environments are inclusive to all students (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Smith (2009) stated,

> When an individual's identities align significantly with the cultural identity of an institution, there is usually a sense of comfort and a lack of awareness of certain salient features of institutional culture.... alignment between an individuals or group and the institution can translate into definitions of excellence that reward some groups and not others. (p.27)

Within this pedagogy, campus climate can be viewed as affecting visibility and belonging. Campus climate is enforced by the campus policies that are designed by an institution's administration. The policies impact equity on a college campus; these polices can encourage or render the aspects that enable identity development and visibility (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guilermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012).

For a long time, higher education institutions function off of "cultural imaginations as beacons of moral leadership and social progress"; a place where students can challenge their beliefs and develop a sense of political stance (Garcia, Arnberg, Weise, & Winborn, 2019, p. 1). The institutions are in a privileged position and have the power to impact its students and their sense of inclusion for diverse students. Campus is designed to nurture learning and provide opportunities for growth and understanding; however, campus should include these kinds of opportunities for all students (Garcia, Arnberg, Weise, & Winborn, 2019, p. 1). Garcia, et. (2019) adapted Ladson-Billings (1998) writing to argue that,

We must continue to dissect the intersection of language, campus climate, and institutional

power so that we may better understand ways we can deconstruct systemic inequities and

construct equitable educational environments. (p.1).

Cultivating an evolving culture takes time and intention; the social aspect of higher education plays

a major role in a student's experience.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a brief historical overview of the Black woman's plight into

higher education. More specifically, this chapter discusses the racial implications on African

American women in and out of higher education. The literature review was designed to discuss

essential components that provide clarification about the lived experiences of African American

women.

Conclusively, Black womens' plight through higher education is challenging and filled

with obstacles. Strayhorn (2012) stated that in higher education, sense of belonging and other

basic human needs is vital and connected to one another. Without these attributes, it is difficult to

feel connected to the institution and feel part of the campus culture. The institution must place

special emphasis on African American female students to ensure their development during their

undergraduate studies.

Chapter two provided an overview of the relevant literature and theories that are

associated to this study. This section served as the foundation for understanding the needs of

African American females and assessing their experiences at predominantly White institutions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to help discover the support needs and wants of Black women undergraduate students at PWIs using critical race methodology. Critical race methodology is defined as a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 24). This study created meaning out of experiences (Green & King, 2001). The other purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of African American female undergraduate students attending a private, predominately White institution in an urban setting with an emphasis on their perception of campus support.

Research Questions

Qualitative research allows the researcher to examine the phenomenon that may "be discovered, however, cannot be legislated by definitions" (Hammersley, 1989, p.121). The following research questions were used to guide this study from a critical race approach to Black feminist thought perspective (Hill Collins, 2009)

1. How do African American women undergraduate students make sense of their support at PWI's?

2. What does it mean to engage African American women undergraduate students at PWI's?

3. How does race and gender impact sense of belonging for African American women at PWI's?

The qualitative research questions in this study are imperative as they seek to "hear the silenced voices" (Creswell, 2013, p.48). Qualitative studies offer researchers the opportunity to explore phenomena about what relatively little is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Additionally, qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, and the flexibility to adapt the design of the study to incorporate new information and interpretations about what people communicate about their experiences (Hammersley, 1989).

Research Design: The Case Study Method

The case study method approach was chosen for this study. Wolcott (1973) described the need for case studies in the field of education and how to use qualitative case studies methods to evaluate education. Robert Yin (1994) defined case study within the research process as, "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context are not clearly evident "(p.13).

Merriam (1998) identifies case studies as "a qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). Merriam (1998) reported on three different kinds of case studies: evaluative, descriptive, and interpretive. Merriam (1998) reported that "the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (p. 19). This research study strives to understand the lived social experiences of African American women undergraduate students at predominantly White institutions.

I applied a critical race theory approach to the process of a case study method. I used critical race theory to explain the role of race within a predominately White institution. Higher education institutions have "historically functioned from a Eurocentric epistemological perspective that

perpetuates dominant ideologies rooted in White superiority, creating what they call an *apartheid of knowledge* in American higher education" (Huber, 2002, p. 161). Higher education operates as a source of knowledge for researchers and scholars, therefore, the information that it constitutes becomes legitimized and valid. Furthermore, CRT evaluates and analyzes how race impacts the experience of the students within their respective PWI's.

Each case study presents a new perspective and better understanding of the research and one's experience. Stake (1995) describes a case as "an integrated system" (p.2) and Smith (1978) reported case studies as a bounded system. These definitions allow me to create boundaries that can focus on one, single entity which are the African American undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution. Miles and Huberman (1994) define case as a "phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p.25). Case studies account for a particular group of people and place focus on a phenomenon.

In order to accurately report on the findings, the ability to document the creative, unexpected, and subjective side of action includes the aspects of human behavior that cannot be predicted or accounted for. This research study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach with an emphasis on the theoretical concepts surrounding critical race theory and Black feminist thought. My study aided in identifying issues and experiences had by Black women on a predominately White campus which allowed disregarded voices to be heard (Mertens, 2015). Qualitative research allows studies to include a particular body of knowledge. Additionally, further in-depth understanding can provide context to the Black female experience at a PWI.

Theoretical Framework

The research on African American women in higher education is limited. The amount of research on the experiences of African American women is limited. However, the research

studies used to support my research assisted with my overall understanding of the literature. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of African American women at predominately White institutions. This chapter includes the theoretical frameworks, research design, participants, and rationale that contribute to this study.

I utilized a Black feminist thought and critical race theory lens to gain a deeper understanding of the Black female experience. The interruptions and experiences represent the women's narratives and plight through a predominately White institution. A Black feminist thought (Hill-Collins, 2009) lens was utilized to analyze the experiences of Black women. Black feminist thought allows a constructive, qualitative approach to the research.

Critical race theory is also a significant theoretical framework within this study. I used critical race theory to explain the role of race within a predominately White institution. Qualitative research allowed the voices of African American female students to be heard, explored, and documented (Hill-Collins, 1989; Hooks, 1989; Hooks, 2000).

Intersectionality of Race and Gender

According to *Feminist Thought* by Rosemarie Tong (2018), most Black feminist do not believe it is possible for women to solely focus on their oppression as women. On the contrary, she believes that most women have a more intimate experience that provides an explanation for her unequal status. Black women encounter both race and gender oppression.

Patricia Hill Collins is a well-known author who contributes to the Black women's perspective. Her book, Black feminist thought (2000) offered an understanding of how United States' culture includes racism and sexism at its foundations and its ability to be inevitable and normalized. Black women experience a different reality than the majority group which makes the Black women experience unique.

In the tenth edition of Black feminist thought, Collins discussed Black feminist thought as a critical social theory. African American women created social thought that was established to oppose oppression. As a defense mechanism, Black women use their voices to emancipate and empower themselves to resist the historic and current oppression (Collins, 1998a, 3-10). In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw wrote *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.* Within this essay, Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) coined the term, *intersectionality.* Intersectionality is defined as "the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings" (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p.51).

Intersectionality was designed as a feminist theory to outline the oppression of women. Crenshaw focused on race and gender as mutually exclusive categories. She goes onto to say, "the values of feminist theory to Black women are diminished because it evolves from a White racial context that is seldom acknowledged. Not only are women of color in fact overlooked, but their exclusion is reinforced when White *women* speak for and as women" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 154).

In her 2016 TED talk, Kimberele Crenshaw describes intersectionality as "a metaphor for understanding inequality or disadvantage and how it compounds and creates obstacles that are not part of the conventional way of thinking." (Crenshaw, 2016.) She goes on to explain how intersectionality explains a Black woman's perspective and inclusion within society. The policies created by the United States government were created to include Black men and White women, while excluding Black women. By including Black men, the laws include African American men. If the law includes women, the law accounts for White women, therefore, Black women are left without protective policies and excluded from the legislation (Crenshaw, 1989, 2017).

White women do not share the same experience as Black women, nor share the same cultural experience. Typically, when women report on feminist issues, all women are placed into one category, having a non-racial perspective. Thus, feminists ignore the role of race and its functions as it applies to sexism and privilege.

In *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex (1989)*, Kimberle Crenshaw wrote, Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to White women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race and on the basis of sex. And sometimes they experience discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (p. 139)

Black women face unique challenges by simply existing. Crenshaw writes about the marginalization of Black women and its lack of attention and discussion in mainstream feminist thought. Collins (2000) wrote about the Black female position on the issues that Black graduate students are faced with by employing an additional perspective. Collins aimed to combat racial and gender oppression at the same time. Within the examination of the Black graduate students, Collins was able to create a new branch of critical race theory that included Black feminist thought.

In an effort to address the intersection of race and gender, Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) hold an argument for critical race feminist theory to join the existing areas of critical race theory (CRT). The CRT feminist theory is important because it assists in the research to examine issues involving women of color in education settings. The experiences of men of color and women of color differ. In order to accurately report the experiences, there must be scale of measurement in place. Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) reported White women and men of

color experience different educational issues. Critical race feminism's purpose is to examine women of color and their plight as they simultaneously encounter multiple forms of oppression; class, race, and gender (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Intersectionality for Black women is unique; it differs from the experiences of Black men and White women. Black women and men share experiences of discrimination, however, Black women experience "double discrimination" (Moses, 1989, p.149). Black women experience discrimination on the basis of race and sex. Black women are consistently described as demanding and have their needs be filtered through categorical investigation versus a compounded identity (Moses, 1989, p.150).

In 2017, Kimberle Crenshaw founded the African American Policy Forum where she created the #WhyWeCantWait campaign. The Why We Can't Wait (2017) campaign is designed to raise awareness on their message on, inclusion of girls and young women of color- in addition to boys and young men of color-in the initiative, because they believe that any program purporting to uplift the lives of youth of color cannot narrow its focus exclusively on just half of the community. This campaign understands that the personal and institutional barriers facing boys and young men of color must be confronted by our sisters, and any racial justice initiative geared towards removing those barriers must account for the lives of all youth of color. If the air is toxic, it is toxic for everyone who has to breathe it.

This campaign strives to hold law makers and members of society accounted for their actions. In addition to raising awareness, this campaign supports the Working Families Summit (2014) message of "anything that makes life harder for women makes life harder for families and makes life harder for children." The same reasoning applies to all inclusive practices within education and overall, in any public space. At the intersection of multiple identities is the chance

to face multiple forms of discrimination and/or oppression. The compound creates a disadvantage in everyday society for Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). We must consider the impact on Black women and levels of discrimination; intersectionality outlines the multiple levels of discrimination.

Patricia Hill Collins is a well-known author who contributes to the Black women's perspective. Her book, Black feminist thought (2000) offered an understanding of how United States' culture includes racism and sexism at its foundations and its ability to be inevitable and normalized. Black women experience a different reality than the majority group which makes the Black women experience unique. In the tenth edition of Black feminist thought, Collins discussed Black feminist thought as a critical social theory. African American women created social thought that was established to oppose oppression. As a defense mechanism, Black women use their voices to emancipate and empower themselves to resist the historic and current oppression (Collins, 1998a, 3-10). Feminism comes in many forms. The definition of feminism is to improve the lives of women socially, economically, and politically.

Critical Race Methodology

Critical race methodology (CRM) is defined as a "theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process." (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). In order to develop critical race methodology, critical race theory must be defined. Yosso (2002) defines CRT based on Mari Matsuda (1991) definition of critical race theory as "the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of the larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin (p. 25)."

Critical race methodology evaluates how race, gender, and class affect the experiences for minority students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Solorzano & Yosso (2002), critical race methodology provides a resource to "counter" deficit storytelling. Throughout critical race methodology, it is necessary to acknowledge the connection to critical race theory aspects that are in the research process. Race is an essential aspect of this qualitative research study and its implications on the student life support given to African American women on campus.

James Banks (1993) claims that race is socially constructed to differentiate racial groups and to show the superiority or dominance of one's race over another. Banks (1995) defines race as, "a human invention constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other groups, to create ideas about the "Other", to formulate their identities and to defend the disproportionate distribution of rewards and opportunities within society" (p. 22). Critical race methodology within education "acknowledges the intercentricity of racialized, oppression-the layers of subordination based on race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality" (Yosso, 2002, p.25).

One of the methods within critical race methodology is counter-storytelling. Counter stories can be used to explain the experience of an African American female and account for the civil discourse that is a direct response to counter the majoritarian point of view (Ikemoto, 1997). Green et al. (2006) describes the story as a portal to interrupt an individual's lived experience. Counter-storytelling aims to cast doubt on the validity of majoritarian stories by providing a different perspective and representation (Stake, 1995).

Stakes (1995) reported that "most contemporary qualitative researchers hold that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered" (Stakes, 1995, p.99). The majoritarian stories hold validity due to the lack of counter-storytelling conducted on college campuses. The experiences of

African American females were reported on by numerous authors (Hill-Collins, 1989; Evans, 2007, Hooks, 2000). Counter-storytelling is a tool for social justice and commitment to equality (Solorzano, 2002). These authors investigated the stories of underrepresented students and shared their perspectives. Counter-storytelling strives to eliminate racism, sexism, and poverty (Solorzano, 2002).

Researcher Positionality

I am a 26-year-old African American woman. I graduated from 2 private, religious-based, predominately White institutions. My role as the investigator is to evaluate the experiences of the participants within this study. I have a personal investment in this study due to my own experiences on a predominantly White campus. During my time at a PWI, I experienced micro-aggressions, incidents of racism, and struggled to form an identity on campus. This research study is an investigative approach to understand the lived experiences of African American women. I will attempt to be aware of my own biases and challenges as I conduct the research. The hardest part of being the researcher may be to withhold my own personal opinions and experiences while I record the participants' accounts.

Data Collection

I used semi-structured interviews with an interruptive phenomenological approach as a form of data collection for this study (Creswell, 1998; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 1990, 2002; Willig, 2001). The primary sources of data collection was through one on one, individual, interviews. The purpose of one on one interviews is to explore each participant's experience as it relates to support and sense of belonging as undergraduate students at Incline University.

Interviews are open dialogue sessions where participants can share their knowledge on their on-campus experience as it relates to student life support. Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions allowed for in-depth information to be shared and discussed. Additionally, semi-structured interviews permit follow-up and clarifying questions (Trochim, 2006).

The semi-structured interviews took place virtually over a Zoom call. The interview approach allowed participants to reflect and discuss their own experience, using their own words. In this study, one on one interview lasted between 15-45 minutes.

The interviews created space for open conversation around their experiences and means of support on campus. The interview questions were aimed at the student's perspective of their campus experience and they discussed any further expectations in regard to on-campus support. Patton (2002) explains that the rationale for conducting an in-depth interview is to collect a variation of the human experience. Interviews allowed the participants to discuss any areas of concern and evaluate their on-campus experience, beyond the scope of the interview questions.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using coding as a qualitative research tool. Coding allowed me to identify themes in a chronological order. Codes are descriptive and reflective data that identify similar experience from different participants. In order to effectively code, I took comprehensive notes throughout the transcriptions from the interviews. Additionally, field notes were reflexive of the detailed accounts of the participants. While I reviewed the data, I also accounted for the "hunches, insights, and intuition" (Cresewell, 2007, p. 145). Once I evaluated the notes and transcriptions, I used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to create meaning of the participants' experiences (Willig, 2001).

My interpretation was written based on my knowledge gained from this study and my own personal experience. The theories that I used to evaluate the data are Black feminist thought, intersectionality, and critical race theory. I used the research questions to organize the collected data. Once I completed the transcripts, I made notes within the margins to note any phenomena and/or significant statements.

I reflected on the codes, themes, and phenomena to create meaning out of these women's lived experiences on a White campus. Creswell (2007) explains the importance of crosschecking as a way to form validity. The final step will be to write my interpretation of the study and assess the knowledge gained from the study.

Participants

According to Polkinghorne (1989), a phenomenology sample should have between 5 and 25 participants. I purposely selected 5 African American women students who live on a predominately White campus in an urban setting to be participants in this study.

To identify and recruit participants, I sent out an email to the women that qualify that includes a summary of my study (Appendix A). I requested that the participants contact me directly. I ensured that all participants know the study was conducted on a voluntary basis with the condition that they can withdraw at any point.

The selection criteria were students who identified as African American, as a woman, undergraduate student, and enrolled in a predominately White institution. Phenomenological research relies on purposeful sampling as a means to identify participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2008). These students held academic standing as either a sophomore, junior, or senior. The participants had to complete at least one full academic year at a PWI while living on campus.

The one year living on campus allowed the participants to describe a sense of belonging and community on campus. I refrained from recruiting freshman status students because they have not been on campus for enough time to provide the information needed in this study. The participants provided data from my research questions that allowed them to reflect on their experiences.

Research Site

The study took place a mid-sized, private, religious-based, predominately white university in an urban setting on the east coast. I created a pseudonym for the University as a way to protect the institution and the participants. I pulled relevant information from the University fact book from the most recent school year, 2018-2019. The University Fact Book provided information to describe the campus population. According to the University Fact Book 2018-2019, full time undergraduate enrollment is 5,592 students. Out of the 5,592 students, 166 of them were African American women. This means, African American females make up 4.31% of the undergraduate student population. This data represents the campus population and the reality that racial diversity on campus is uncommon.

Limitations

Within this research, it is important to consider any limitation that impacted the study. The case study method has several limitations. For the case study method, it is difficult to generalize the results of the population. Due to me being an alumna of a predominantly White institution, my own subjectivity or feeling may influence the case study. Additionally, the area of study is a limitation. The African American women on campus may feel different levels of support from student services. The participants had the opportunity to discuss their major and on-campus support. Therefore, the findings varied from major to major.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the methodology that was used to describe the phenomenon of the experience of African American women who live on a PWI campus. The participants were selected based on the study's criteria. The interviews were conducted on an individual basis. The interviews provided descriptive data that include each student's perspective. I video recorded the interviews to evaluate any themes that were discussed. The data collected were responses to the interview questions that were pre-selected. I transcribed the interviews. Once the interviews were transcribed, I analyzed and evaluated them to identify codes.

CHAPTER 4

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the results of the research study for the support at Incline University. The analyzed data offered insight into the experiences of African American women on Incline University's campus. These women describe their encounters on campus and their lived experiences while living on campus. The participants in this study are five undergraduate, African American women that offer various perspectives on the many kinds of support on campus or the lack of support.

This chapter will include quotes from the participants that explain their meaning of support on campus. Data was collected from five different participants who are from different states, major of study, and academic standing. A brief description of each participant will be provided for the study. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the interviews were conducted virtually. The data was collected via virtual Zoom meetings. The data was examined through a Black feminist thought lens. These results were organized with coding based on responses from the research questions.

The findings of this study showed that Black women on campus feel isolated, unwelcomed, and unsupported. Each participant shared different experiences on campus that led them to feel this way. These feelings stemmed from a lack of understanding from their peers, faculty, and staff. The women described often feeling that they didn't have a space big enough to share their concerns or challenges on campus. They also shared that they've never been approached by upper-level administration about their experience or how to improve the culture by making it more inclusive. However, the administration approached the women for a superficial reason such as a photo opportunity for the campus website or a discussion group in

the wake of Black Lives Matter. Although there was some account of positive support from a few select peers and faculty, the participants still reported frequent micro and macro-aggressions.

Following the semi-structured interviews, the data was put into themes based on the participants' responses. The three themes were (1) support system, (2) experiences on campus, and (3) barriers to peer and faculty interactions. Each theme is a commonly discussed topic within the interviews. Within each theme are subsections that provide more specific examples of how each theme impacted the participant.

Participant Introductions

The participant introductions offered a brief overview of information about each participant's academic standing, geographic home location, and major of study at Incline University. The participant introductions provide context to their individual experience. This information provides a background into the diverse group of African American undergraduate students that participated in this research study. This section will introduce pseudonyms that were used for the remainder of the chapter.

Kristen was a senior who studied liberal arts. She decided to attend Incline University after visiting the campus and "really like the setting and how small it was". Kristen was a resident assistant, president of the university's Black Student Union, and a member of the multicultural club that focuses on Black women and the International Student Organization.

Kiara was a senior, healthcare related major. Kiara chose to attend Incline University because Incline University provided financial support. Kiara was the president of a multicultural club that focuses on Black women and the University's NAACP chapter.

Allison was a junior, healthcare related major. She chose to attend Incline University because "the school felt the same as my high school and offered me a scholarship"

(A.Washington, personal communication, December 9, 2020). Allison also mentioned that she wanted to create some distance from home to "fully immerse in the college culture".

Sherri was a senior, who studied the Health Administration program. Sherri was an active member of a multicultural club that focuses on women, the Caribbean Student Association, and the Black Student Union. Sherri described the experience of having social groups disband over time and not having enough spaces where she belonged.

Jamica was a sophomore who studied behavioral science. Jamica is a member of a multicultural club that focuses on Black women and the Black Student Union. Initially, Jamica wanted to attend a historically Black college or university, however, she chose Incline University because they offered her the most money. The scholarship supported Jamica as she wanted to "help my mom financially because she is a single parent" (A.Washington, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

Findings

When analyzing the lived experiences of undergraduate Black women at this predominantly White institution three themes emerged. These themes were discussed by all of the participants as a source of support on campus. Table 1 below identifies the themes as it relates to support on campus. The themes are (1) support system, (2) experiences on campus, and (3) barriers to peer and faculty interactions. Additionally, each theme had sub-sections to further explain the theme and its purpose.

The support system includes (1) the interactions with the Black faculty and staff; (2) representation on campus; (3) the need for more Black faculty and staff; and (4) Black women peer support. The interactions on campus refer to relationships between the participants and the Black faculty and staff that provide support. Representation on campus refers to the lack of

Black staff and faculty at Incline University and how that impacts the women's experiences. Each participant discussed the need for more Black faculty and staff. They believe having more Black faculty and staff will enhance their support and they will develop a greater sense of belonging. In addition to the Black faculty and staff, the participants described strong relationships with their Black women peers.

Table 1- Themes

Theme	Description
Support System	Participants provided interactions with administrators at Incline University and how they provide emotional support on campus
Experiences on Campus	Participants discuss their experiences on campus
Barriers to Peer and Faculty Interactions	Participants discussed experiences that negatively influenced their faculty to student and peer to student relationships that they had on campus.

Support System

Support is a topic that each participant described in their own way. Support refers to the people, organizations, and engagement that help them feel connected to the campus community. The participants reported that their support system helped them stay engaged on campus and encouraged during challenging times. The support system provided a safe outlet for their concerns as well as triumphs.

Interactions with Black Faculty and Staff

Each participant discussed their interactions with Black staff and faculty as a supportive resource on campus. Although the individual experiences may vary, the overall supportive nature of Black faculty and staff remained the same. The participants describe the relationship with Black faculty and staff as supportive and helpful. Black faculty and staff provided the

participants with a sense of belonging while on campus. The participants reported feeling like they belonged on campus because of the way the Black faculty and staff "validated their feelings and experiences."

Representation on Campus

Within each semi-structured interview, the participants discussed seeking guidance and counsel from a designated Black staff or faculty member. These individuals served as an unofficial mentor. Only one Black staff member and one Black faculty member was mentioned amongst all the participants' interviews. All the participants referenced the same two Black staff and faculty members as unofficial mentors. There was mention of seeing other Black staff and faculty members on campus, but the participants did not engage with them or have any kind of relationship. However, the Black faculty and staff members who served as unofficial mentors provided emotional support and the participants would confide in these individuals when they encountered a challenge on campus, especially racial issues.

Jolyn Dahlvig (2010) conducted a research study at a similar research site to this research study. Dahlvig reported that the students felt supported when working with a mentor who has "been there". The notion that an individual has a shared experience creates a bond that blossoms into trust and belonging. Representation on campus means employing more Black staff and faculty. The Black students who attend PWIs must be represented on campus as a means to create a sense of belonging.

Kristen identified one Black staff member as "someone who understands me and my experience. She takes the time to listen to me and just helps me feel seen. I probably would transfer to an HBCU if she weren't here. Black women need more support on campus. PWI's need to better support Black women." (K. Smith, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Kristen further states, "I wanted to find people on campus who could carry me through these four years. My experience is unique because not only am I a woman, but I am a Black woman." (K. Smith, December 9, 2020) Jamica described the interactions with Black faculty and staff as "feeling included and understood. I've always wanted to go to an HBCU to feel included, but I found people on campus in administration and who make me feel wanted." (J. Brooks, December 9, 2020)

Kiara recalled a situation during her freshman year where she was singled out in a class and felt the overwhelming pressure to answer a question on behalf of the Black population. Kiara explained that the micro-aggression impacted the way she continued on in the class. Kiara didn't feel comfortable speaking up in class or sharing her views with her peers.

Following the incident, Kiara sought out support from a Black faculty member. Kiara reported feeling guilty for "taking up so much time. I wish there were more Black staff to talk to about these kinds of issues. It can be hard to hold this in." (K. Brown, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Allison described a similar classroom incident. One of Allison's professors directly asked Allison how she felt about the medical disparities against Black women. This professor singles out Allison to discuss her opinions on medical malpractice due to racial discrimination. This situation is a macro-aggression that was handled with neglect and cruelty. Allison said she felt "uncomfortable and like she wanted to walk out of class." (A.Washington, personal communication, December 9, 2020). Following this incident, Allison sought counsel from a Black staff member who "understood her struggle and validated her feelings." (A.Washington, personal communication, December 9, 2020). This incident was one of many that these women experienced.

Many of the participants said there had been other experiences they have either "forgotten about or made me forget." The Black faculty and staff provided mentorship to these women during times of frustration and triumph. The participants would also report back to the Black staff and faculty about their various accomplishments.

Kristen noted that,

> Predominately White institutions are not made for Black students, specifically Black women. I often find myself talking to a Black staff member to get support. The multicultural affairs office is supportive but what they can offer me is limited because their resources are limited. Their office is so small, and they shouldn't be the only resource for Black women on campus. The resources that they offer for minority students can go so far. For example, if we were able to establish a women in stem club but for minority women, it would be so beneficial. There are women in stem group but I'm the only Black woman, so I still am different from them. (K. Smith, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Kristen's experience shaped the way she views campus and its community.

Kristen's account aligns with Black feminist thought on Black women not receiving the support they need. Black women are members of two different minority populations and need resources to accommodate their unique experience. Black women face multiple burdens which create various challenges inside and outside the classroom. Predominately White institutions need to be equipped with resources to handle the challenges presented to Black women students. Additionally, the offered resources need to be intentionally selected solely for Black women. By providing these resources, Black women students will have an increased sense of belonging and engagement on campus.

The Need for More Black Faculty and Staff

By employing more Black faculty and staff at PWI's, Black students would feel represented. The university would send a clear message that they value a diverse community. The participants in this research study shared how they wish there were more Black faculty and staff members on campus. These individuals provide a relatable perspective for these women and allow them to speak "freely without judgment." Allison felt like she burdened the Black staff member with her experiences and wanted more Black staff and faculty to build strong relationships. Allison felt that Black staff were "easier to approach" than White staff or faculty members.

Every participant noted that there should be more Black faculty and staff members at Incline University as these individuals provide a mentor to mentee relationship with a shared experience. During freshman year Kiara was confronted with a macro-aggression from one of her professors. One of Kiara's professors discouraged her from joining the healthcare program because he stated it "might not be the best fit for someone like you." (K. Brown, personal communication, December 9, 2020) Following this event, Kiara confided in a Black staff member who provided a supportive attitude and shared in her frustration.

Kiara explained the lack of understanding from the university's higher administration and confided in a Black staff member to share her frustrations. Kiara shared, "The university pushes the narrative of diversity and inclusion, but they just do it for the numbers. I don't feel like they really care for us, Black women, but we are just numbers." (K. Brown, personal communication, December 9, 2020) As a Black student at this PWI, the women explained how they've never been approached by upper-level leadership or administration asking them what they need or what

61

they want. However, the participants mentioned that their peers are constantly confronted with questions about how they want to improve campus or make changes.

Sherri indicated her frustration with the lack of representation on campus by stating, "More Black staff would create space where we could freely speak about our concerns." (S. Carter, personal communication, December 9, 2020) The participants explained that Black faculty and staff have a "better understanding" of their experience and provide a sense of belonging that they haven't felt with the White faculty and staff.

Black Women Peer Support

Each participant reported feeling connected to the other Black women on campus. As a Black woman at a PWI, the women share the commonality of a unique experience. In regard to gender and race, Black women are a double minority. All the participants mentioned forming a group of strong, Black women to support them. When asked about their main source of support, each participant accounted for their Black women friend group. The women shared that they "understood each other's experience" and "didn't have to explain themselves or their frustration." The women discussed finding comfort in shared experiences and challenges. All participants are part of multicultural clubs on campus. They created a safe space to share the complexities that come with being a Black woman at a predominately White institution.

Kiara is the president of a multicultural club that focuses on Black women. She spends extra time talking with the Black women on campus and planning events around their interest. She was the only participant that is the leader of a group of Black women. Kiara noted,

> During my sophomore year, I realized where all the Black people were. They were on the
>
> football team, the basketball team, and not many just leisurely hanging around. I found

my group of friends that I could confide in and be comfortable around. (K. Brown, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Kiara described her group of friends as her support system, especially for the "hard days." She described her hard days as the days where she has to explain an aspect of her blackness. According to Kiara, the amount of time she has to explain her blackness has increased in the wake of Black Lives Matter. Following George Floyd's murder, the country took a major turn in the fight against racism. The country faced unrest and Black people collectively challenged the police force. Police abuse their power by killing unarmed Black men and women. Police brutality remains a problem, however, social media allows these murders to be circulated, quickly. More people of color started speaking up about their experience and directly addressing the racial tension that exists in our country. The racial tension exists on campus just as heavily as it exists in American society. PWI's administration must take this into account when planning for a diverse community.

Kristen is part of several communities that focus on the Black woman. However, Kristen comes from a predominately White community and attended a predominately White high school. Kristen is part of several clubs on campus that focus on minorities and women. Kristen shared, "As a Black woman, I face intersectionality a lot. I am a woman, but I am also Black. Being around other Black women helps me to feel included and supported."
(K. Smith, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

Kristen expressed feeling comforted by Black women peers at Incline University. Kristen is part of a Greek sorority which supports and uplifts the Black female voice and experience. The sorority helps Kristen feel wanted and increases her sense of belonging on campus. Although she spends time with other Black women on campus, Kristen says she joined a sorority to engage

with other "strong, determined Black women who understand her experience. Campus culture isn't as welcoming for Black women as it is for Black men. We need more support and our own space to be ourselves." (K. Smith, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Black women are underserved and underrepresented at PWI's. Allison shared her experience with connecting with her social group on campus. During her freshman year, Allison recalled joining a group of Black students who were talking during orientation. She expanded to say:

> I love how Black women find each other on campus. We immediately bonded because we were all in the same group. From then on, we stayed close to each other. I got to know them, and we bonded over our shared experiences. I love being part of the multicultural club on campus because we can talk about the issues on campus that impact us, directly.
>
> (A. Washington, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Allison recounted these moments during freshman year as shaping her experience at Incline University.

Building a friend group was Allison's first line of support as she transitioned from a predominately Black high school to a predominately White institution. Black women form bonds based on shared experience through intimate dialogue. The women acknowledge "the struggle" and provide a safe space for understanding. "The struggle" refers to the specific hardship experiences of Black women in society and on campus. The struggle is only understood by Black women who have faced disparities as it relates to being Black and a woman. Dealing with the stereotypes, assumptions, and exclusion are all part of the Black woman experience. Each participant expressed different experiences with these scenarios and how they impacted their view of campus and its culture.

Experiences on Campus

This research study focused on the experiences of five Black female undergraduate students. Each participant reported unique experiences about their time on campus. Their experiences are categorized by involuntary independence and safe space. The participants shared encounters of having to be independent when left with no other option. Black women are always sacrificing their level of comfortability to accommodate their White counterparts. This section describes the involuntary independence and safe places for the Black women on campus.

Involuntary Independence

The participants in this study all described unique experiences on campus as it relates to being Black women. Each experience impacted the way the women engage on campus. Some of the participants felt misunderstood or struggled to feel included.

Kiara, a senior at Incline University, shared stories that began at her freshman year about how she felt excluded from certain spaces on campus. She said,

> I never felt fully comfortable on campus. Some people stare and wonder why you're even
>
> here. They make assumptions about you and I got tired of feeling like I was the problem.
>
> I decided after my sophomore year to make space and engage more on campus. I started
>
> to make new friends and ignore the negative people on campus. This changed my
>
> experience overall. (K. Brown, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Kiara made a conscious decision to make her undergraduate experience a more positive one. She was intentional about who she spent her time with and how she reacted to negative, racist people on campus. Kiara did not feel that upper-level administration and leadership cared about her or knew what kind of support she needed to be successful. "I don't think they even know who I am. They never ask. I've been in spaces with administrators and they call me

another Black girl's name. Sometimes I don't even correct them." (K. Brown, personal communication, December 9, 2020) Black women are devalued in American society and their experiences on campus reassure these feelings. The women are not free to be themselves due to fear of judgement. The women described feelings of judgement before even meeting people or speaking in class. These feelings led the women to be more reserved and "kept to themselves".

Kristen shared a classroom experience where she felt as if the professors were only interested in getting to know her because she was the only minority student in the class. Kristen explains,

> There needs to be more support on campus. If I had to redo my undergraduate studies, I would attend a school that was more diverse. I would go to an HBCU. I had to support myself. In a way, I felt independent because I didn't need to rely on anybody. I shouldn't have to feel like that. I should be able to go to my professors and get help. I don't think that support is offered at Incline University or a PWI. I could be a stronger student if BSU (Black Student Union) was activated when I was a freshman. It just got reactivated and it helped me find support. (K. Smith, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Kristen spoke about having to rely on herself for support because her professors weren't supportive. Kristen explained that professors did not ask the same questions or make the same assumptions about their White peers. She pointed to the idea of self-preservation to remain encouraged to stay enrolled at Incline University. She pulled positive aspects of her experience to "remain motivated and strong". Kristen relied on herself to feel supported and used that feeling to engage with diversity campus groups. The multicultural affairs office provided the women with organizations that are designed for them and led by them. Although the multicultural affairs office offers some resources, they are still limited.

Safe Spaces

Within the women's experiences, each participant discussed engagement with several multicultural groups on campus. These clubs provided a safe space for the women to discuss issues about race and facilitate events that were culturally relevant to their interest. Jamica was part of a club whose main focus was Black women and Black Student Union. During the club meetings, Jamica said that she was able to,

...be myself and turn it off. I spoke freely about campus issues and we share stories about what was going on around campus. Everyone understood what I was going through, and the campus climate has been tense. Ever since J.B.'s mom began her protest, White people have been saying all kinds of things. (J. Brooks, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

As a Black woman living through the current state of culture, race plays a significant role. Creating space on campus to discuss their experiences as minority women allows them to bond over shared experience. Jamica said, "my friend group is pretty diverse. We are all Black women but come from different places. We have different majors and we always talk about these kinds of issues." (J. Brooks, personal communication, December 9, 2020) The issues refer to topics about race, gender, and/or the intersection of race and gender.

Like Jamica, Allison is part of the same organizations and share almost identical thoughts on the group gatherings. "I'm grateful to have the friends that I have. I don't have to explain anything about Black culture or my blackness. There's no pressure to act a certain way. I can be myself and not think twice about it." (A. Washington, personal communication, December 9, 2020) Allison respected her friends and they respected her as well. There was a mutual understanding that any and everything they share would be safe and most likely understood.

The women took comfort in not having to explain themselves. This sentiment aligns with Collins (1986) "outsider-within". Black women are constantly treated as outsiders and assimilate into a community that offers more support to their White peers. The lack of support causes the women to have a decreased sense of belonging and less likely to engage on campus.

Along with Jamica and Allison, Sherri shared experiences with the clubs on campus and how they helped her engage with her peers and administration on campus. Sherri was part of the multicultural group that focuses on Black women, a member of the Black Student Union, and a professional healthcare fraternity group. Sherri shared that she doesn't like going up to her White peers to start a conversation. She didn't feel comfortable putting herself in a vulnerable position

…to feel excluded and unwanted. They usually already have their group established…I've had some really bad interactions on campus especially following the 2016 election. People started showing their true colors. Following the 2016 election, I went to the multicultural affairs office to get some support and talk. (S. Carter, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

The multicultural affairs office served as a safe haven for the participants. This office is where the "others" get support on campus. The participants explained how the multicultural affairs office was designed for minority students to get support and assess minority issues. However, one office that only has two full-time staff members cannot be solely responsible for all minority groups. Even though the participants felt safe in their specific spaces, they still experienced micro and macro aggressions on campus.

Barriers to Peer and Faculty Interactions and Assimilation

The women did not discuss feeling comfortable sharing their concerns with the White faculty and staff. The participants did not have positive perceptions of their professors. In fact, each participant shared their experiences with professors who discouraged them from their academic pursuits.

Microaggressions, Macroaggressions, and Stereotypes

Each participant shared experiences of microaggressions and macroaggressions on campus. The women reported feeling their "professors stereotype Black students and don't believe they will succeed in their chosen fields." Sherri noted, "I have had professors who told me that I will not make it in my major and that I should switch to something else." (S. Carter, personal communication, December 9, 2020) Sherri discussed how she struggled academically alongside her White peers, however, the professor only approached her about changing majors. In these moments, Sherri recalls feeling frustrated, out of place, and defeated.

Kristen recounted an experience with a professor,

With the height of the Black Lives Matters movement, people just look to you for answers. I think it's ridiculous because during my freshman year it wasn't like that. But now senior year, it was more of a- you should know the answer. I'm only 21 and a senior. It's a lot of pressure to answer questions for the Black community. I don't speak for everyone. One of my minors is pre-med and I had a professor tell me that this track wasn't made for me and I need to change my major. I struggled a bit early on, but I find that to be disheartening because it was the start of my college career and I had to find the motivation within myself because I wouldn't find it with the professors. But it was interesting because my lab partner was going through the same issue and the professor

never said anything discouraging to her. I felt excluded. (K. Smith, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

Kristen was the repeated victim of classroom micro and macroaggressions. The professor chose to discourage Kristen from pursuing a career in healthcare, however, did not approach her White peer. The professor showed his bias and discriminated against Kristen. Unfortunately, this kind of situation happens often to Black women. Black women are constantly having to explain themselves and defend their position. Black women are always at a disadvantage due to the stereotypes that are set against them. The stereotypes surrounding Black women include laziness, aggression, being obnoxious, and fulfilling the "angry Black woman" persona.

Despite one professor's opinion about Kristen's healthcare major, she pursued a career in healthcare. The same professor taught another required course and Kristen had another negative experience. She noted,

> I had a professor, the same professor who said I couldn't make it in pre-med. Basically, he emphasized the point that I wouldn't make it in sports medicine. He told me that there was no point in trying. I got the impression that he was pro-man and didn't think women belonged in the field and definitely not Black women. It was as if he was saying "you are a woman and you don't belong here." (K. Smith, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Kiara recalled a time during her junior year where she had a conversation with an upper-level administrator. During their conversation, Kiara recounted her experience:
"I never realized how ignorant upper staff was of Black people's issues. They really lack the knowledge of their Black students' issues and are extremely blind to them." (K. Brown, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

Black Hair and Identity

Black women are constantly put into position where they have to explain themselves. Three out of five of the participants discussed an incident that involved their hair. Hair is a common topic of conversation when it comes to having cultural conversations with White peers. Allison was the first participant to describe an incident with peers about her hair. A White peer came up to Allison asking questions about her hair and why she changed it so much. Allison decided to take the time to explain protective hairstyles and the importance of hair maintenance. Allison realized that her White peers really didn't understand her fully:

> I've had White people come up to me and tell me I was their first Black friend. There would be times where I would do something weird or confusing to them…None of them would want to ask me about it. They weren't trying to be rude. They just genuinely hadn't had any Black friends. So, I felt like I was always educating people…my whole entire freshman year. They would say "your hair grew" or "your hair looked differently yesterday." Little things like that are common in the Black community they had no idea about. I found myself answering so many questions." (A. Washington, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Hair is important to Black women. More recently, the natural hair movement changed to include natural hairstyles. Furthermore, Black women feel more empowered to publicly embrace their natural hair without shame or judgement. For a long time, Black women used harmful chemicals in their hair to be accepted in society. Black women wouldn't be viewed the same if they had their hair in an afro versus chemically straightened. Straight hair, which may be hair extensions, was more acceptable for work, school, and anywhere outside of the home. The

cultural shift to embrace natural hair allows Black women to share their creativity and culture through their hair.

Sherri noted a time where she was approached by a White peer who wanted to know more about her hair and why it has changed from one day to the next. Sherri noted,

> She clearly didn't know anything about Black people, so I thought it was weird……I had to explain to them that something that may be weird to them may be normal to us. It may just be a cultural difference and then us learning each other's differences." (S. Carter, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Black women taking the time to explain hair and its versatility is part of the Black women experience. Sentiments like these highlight a larger issue where Black women are put in a position to be uncomfortable because White people feel empowered to assert their privilege. White privilege allows White people to set qualifications for what is acceptable and appropriate. Therefore, White people feel entitled to question anyone who does not fit into their standard of hair care. The participants' White peers question the different styles and some request, "Can I touch your hair?" Many participants shared encounters where their White peers asked to touch their hair. The women described being uncomfortable but "used to it".

Lack of Knowledge- Culturally Relevant Differences

Throughout their time at Incline University, the participants accounted for multiple times where they either had to explain their blackness to their White counterparts or felt misunderstood due to a decision they made about hair, food, or any concept of their culture. Black women do not fit into the community at PWIs because they are not part of the majority group on campus or in society. The feeling of lack of worth can be observed through the lack of commitment to

address issues that affect Black women on campus. The participants felt that their White peers were valued in higher regard and treated differently than them.

Each participant noted difficulty when trying to explain their experiences. Based on the women's experiences, the administration lacked the knowledge to support these women. Although the women experienced some support from White peers, faculty, and staff they still reported these experiences.

Similarly, to Kristen, Allison expressed the need to rely on herself to feel supportive and motivated. Allison describes feelings of not being understood by her White faculty. "I spent my first two years here trying to educate my White friends." (A. Washington, personal communication, December 9, 2020) Allison had a White roommate and took time to explain the parts of her culture that differed from her roommate's culture. Allison described feeling grateful that her roommate wanted to get to know her and her lifestyle versus making assumptions. The pressure to explain herself wasn't present and Allison was able to share her story without assumptions.

Sherri, Allison, and Jamica were all raised in predominately Black communities. They shared different experiences than Kristen and Kiara who were raised in predominately White communities. Kristen and Kiara felt better equipped to handle the questions asked of them by their White peers. Kristen explained,

> I grew up in a predominately White suburb in Pennsylvania. I went to a predominately White high school so all the questions and comments that White people said to me I heard before. I didn't let it impact me the way I did before but it's still frustrating. My professors made comments that made me feel uncomfortable, but I don't think they are coming from a bad place. Campus was different coming back from the summer because

all that was going on with K.C.'s mother and the professor who made derogatory

statements. I feel like my professors wanted to make me comfortable. I do believe some

professors support Black people but don't know how. They end up saying the wrong

thing and try to backtrack. I don't associate myself with that. So, I found my group of

people and made myself comfortable. (Kristen Smith, personal communication,

December 9, 2020)

Kristen mentioned having several interactions like the one she described. However, in the

wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, the culture on and off campus changed. Kristen

described the racial tension on campus and how White peers and faculty approach her with

questions. Kristen mentioned the pressure she feels from her White peers and faculty to speak on

behalf of the entire Black community. Within all the participants' accounts of peer interaction,

the participants were responsible for creating their own sense of belonging and felt pressured to

explain themselves.

Chapter 5- Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore challenges experienced by African American women at predominantly White institutions (PWI's). By examining the experiences of African American women at a PWI, my goal is to provide the university's administration with helpful information to improve support for Black women. Addressing issues of race and gender in higher education are part of understanding a Black woman's reality (Patton, 2016; Collins, 2015). As proposed by Linley (2018), understanding a Black woman's position while enrolled and living on campus can be used to help create a more inclusive community and culture. Thus, the results of this study can also help to create inclusion at the institution of study.

As a Black woman who is an educational leader at a predominately White higher education institution, my experiences as an administrator and student impact my perceptions of campus culture and campus community. As a Black woman on campus, I am often approached by Black undergraduate women who want to discuss the challenges that they had on campus regarding their treatment by campus faculty and staff. The only way to decrease and/or eliminate the racial disparities on campus is to address them. Thus, this research study was created to address an underserved, marginalized group of women who remain voiceless in White dominated spaces. Black women are rarely, if ever, asked their opinion on their experiences or perspective.

This research is important because Black women are attending PWIs, however, they are not treated the same as their White peers. The data provides several examples of the inequality and discrimination that these women face during their time at a PWI. Using a critical race theory and Black feminist thought lens, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data regarding the experiences of the participants. Through these interviews, the women shared their

understanding of campus culture and how it affected their engagement and support while on campus. The research questions that were used to guide this study are as follows:

1. How do African American women undergraduate students make sense of their support at a predominantly White Institution (PWI)?

2. What does it mean to engage African American women undergraduate students at PWIs?

3. How does race and gender impact sense of belonging for African American women at PWIs?

The results of the study are categorized into three major themes. First, participants described a support system, where students and administrators have supported them on campus and have allowed the women to feel a sense of belonging on campus. The participants described their support system as peers, faculty, staff, and campus organizations. Second, participants discuss their experience on campus, regarding racism and discrimination. Third, participants shared barriers and faculty interactions, including limited support on campus. Each participant included information about each of these themes and provided thorough examples. This chapter will include a review of the findings and implications of this study as it relates to improvements in future practice, research and theory.

Discussion of the Findings

This section will provide an overview of this study's findings as it relates to the research questions. As the literature suggested, the participants reported feeling isolated, unwelcomed, and frustrated. Grant (2012) provided reasoning for the negative experiences had by Black women: the inequity, isolation, and unfair treatment that Black women face. Black women are

many times unable to meet their full academic or intellectual capabilities because they are often neglected or not supported.

African American women at Incline University reported negative experiences while being on campus. Negative experiences for these women was partly a result of having minimal support from White administrators, which are the majority at the institution. The lack of support came from their peers, faculty, and staff members.

Campus for Black Women: Addressing the Research Questions

African American undergraduate students make sense of their support or lack thereof, in complicated ways between their peers, staff, and administration. Race and gender were significant factors, impacting the extent of support granted to these students. In this research study, participants suggested that support came in many forms. The participants described their support systems as those around them who provided comfort and understanding, especially during difficult times.

The main sources of support for participants were from other Black peers, Black faculty and staff, and White peers. The participants in this study explained the support that each of these individuals provided to them and how it made them feel connected to the campus community. More specifically, many Black women reported an increase of campus engagement once they had connected to these individuals. For instance, they felt more comfortable and participated more in clubs and organizations with their Black peers once they understood who the groups served and benefitted.

As examined in the literature review, the research suggested that Black women need support in order to have a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn reported that racialized experiences contribute to a lack of sense of belonging. The participants in this study described

the impact that their race played into their lives on campus and how poorly they were treated because of their race and gender. The women discussed not being able to share their concerns or grievances with higher level administration because they did not believe anyone cared. This notion is in agreement and aligns with Sengupta and Upton's (2011) finding that Black women lack affirmation from the on-campus community which includes peers, staff, and faculty. These women have experienced racial disparities that manifest into absent relationships with campus administration, which is likely due to the fact that most of the administration is White.

The participants in this study reported having a difficult time connecting to campus because of their treatment by campus administration. For instance, Kristen wrote a detailed letter to an upper-level campus leader. Within this letter, Kristen noted the frustrations with faculty and a few staff members who made Kristen feel uncomfortable and disrespected. The upper-level campus leader never responded to the letter, nor were the responsible parties reprimanded for their actions. Kristen was left without support and change. As stated by Roeser, Eccles, and Sameroff (1998) students must nourish their need for belongingness in educational environments.

Kristen hoped to gain nourishment in the form of a returned letter. Because it was not returned, it left her frustrated and feeling like the university did not care about her concerns. Stories like Kristen's continually show how investment in Black women's experiences is compromised by White administrators who wittingly or unwittingly are challenged in addressing their concerns. When those administrators do not provide the necessary care and concern, it forces Black women to create their own support systems that rely on Black faculty, staff, and students.

The support systems consisted of friends, Black staff and faulty, and the various organizations housed within the multicultural affairs office. The participants' friends consisted of other Black women who understood their experiences and have been through similar situations. Throughout the women's' interviews, they made mention of "the struggle" which Reddick and Prichett (2015) described as the challenges faced by Black people in society. The participants described challenging situations as part of the struggle of being Black on campus.

Due to these challenges, the women sought support on campus. The participants noted feeling comfortable talking with their peers. While their Black women peers provided support, the participants also received support from Black faculty and staff. They reported the staff and faculty making them feel seen, heard, and understood. These individuals served as unofficial mentors and offered professional and motivational support to the women. Several of the participants described feelings of being misunderstood by White administrators but understood by Black administrators.

For example, Sherri's professor had singled Sherri out during a seminar about the medical disparities against Black people in the United States. Sherri was the only Black student in the class and did not feel comfortable with her professor asking her about this topic in front of her peers. Sherri said that she didn't answer the question and walked out of class. This situation led Sherri to seek guidance from a Black staff member who she told the story and asked how to handle this situation. Sherri explained that she wanted to reach out to the Dean to address this issue. The Dean assured Sherri that this professor would be reprimanded. Sherri never received any follow up with the Dean and the professor continued to use other micro- and macroaggressions throughout the semester. Throughout the participants' time on campus, not one person reported an administrator being reprimanded for their actions.

This example clearly illustrates another form of disrespect that Black women face while being enrolled at a PWI. There is a lack of accountability from the staff and faculty who make remarks or ask questions that are inappropriate, forcing these women to highlight the stereotypes and misconceptions of their entire race. The women cannot speak for their entire race nor should that be an expectation. Black women are constantly being put into positions where they are expected to be mistreated and not allowed to show any emotions with a fear of being labeled as the "angry Black woman", which is a false narrative historically told about Black women.

Black women are faced with many challenges when it comes to showing any kind of emotion towards a given situation. Due to fear of judgement and being misunderstood, many Black women struggle to find a way to effectively communicate their thoughts (Grant, 2012). This sentiment provides a deeper explanation as to why many time Black women do not feel supported at PWIs.

The Meaning of Engagement for African American Women Undergraduate Students

The participants in this study reported feeling the most connected to the University when surrounded by their Black peers and Black faculty and staff. Black women were not finding the support from their White peers, faculty and staff. They explained that their Black women peers understood their experiences and supported them. The participants felt their White peers passed judgement or made assumptions about them. Due to feeling this way, the participants expressed hesitancy when approaching their White peers, which hindered building any kind of relationship, and ultimately, a support system with them. A majority of the participants reported not having close relationships with their White peers. Although the participants found it challenging to form relationships with their White counterparts, they still managed to create safe spaces on campus.

Each participant provided examples of their safe space. All the participants referenced the multicultural affairs office as a safe space where they felt their racial and cultural identities were celebrated. This office had a positive effect on their sense of belonging and provided opportunities for the participants to celebrate their racial identity and culture. The participants reported the multicultural affairs office had a helpful resource for feeling connected to the campus community and connection to their other Black peers.

When discussing engagement, participants repeatedly mentioned the multicultural affairs office, which provided seemingly basic; yet, astoundingly important levels of involvement. Simply existing in the space was enough for the participants, as it made them feel at home. However, the office also provided financial, emotional and academic support to the students, because they felt they could not get it in the spaces their White peers received it.

Although the multicultural affairs office provided supportive resources, it was limited. One office was responsible for Black students to share their grievances about the racial disparities that takes place on campus, which placed burden on the sole non-administrative employee that worked there. Along with Patton (2016), the participants believe that there needs to be more offices for Black students. More offices on campus to support Black students would offer these students more opportunities to positively connect with the campus and in turn positively affect their sense of belonging.

Race and Gender for Sense of Belonging at PWI's

When the participants discussed their experience as Black women on campus, they could not separate their gender and race. They described the impact of their gender as not being treated equal to White men and their gender as being treated less than their White peers and even Black men. Participants were not finding the support from White women nor Black men. The lack of

support from their counterparts allowed these women to make stronger connections with each other. Because they could not rely on White students or Black male students to understand the disparities they face, it shaped an opportunity to build a tight bond between Black women, where they created space to share their experiences.

However, barriers were in place towards getting to know the White community at Incline University. Subsequently, the closer participants got with other Black women, more and more they felt distant from other people. Ultimately, they were placed in a predicament where they felt burdened by the inequalities, marginalization, and isolation on campus, which negatively impacted their sense of belonging.

Throughout the semi-structured interviews, the participants discussed how their race impacted their experience. Moreover, the Black women realized that their race and gender are significant when analyzing their experiences on campus. The intersection of race and gender affect Black women differently than their White peers because they are placed between two minority groups. The women reported being treated as inferior in comparison to their White counterparts (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

The participants were frustrated about their treatment as it was unwarranted and unjustified; however, they were used to White professors treating them poorly and never offering an explanation. One of the participants reported that her lab professor approached her about having a B grade in the class and discouraged her from pursuing a career in the healthcare field. Whereas, to her knowledge, her lab partner who had a C in the class was never approached or discouraged to pursue a career in the healthcare field. Consequentially, these narratives are familiar to the Black women and make it difficult to form relationships with White administrators. None of the participants reported support from the White faculty or staff on

campus. All the participants mentioned keeping distance from their professors as a self-protection technique to minimize any negative encounters. These situations made the women feel distant from the campus community and it negatively impacted their sense of belonging.

Implications and Recommendations

Following the findings of this research study, this section provides implications for practice, research, and theory. While this study focused on the experiences of five undergraduate Black women at a PWI, the results of this study enlighten the university's administration of the types of support that Black women require in order to form a positive sense of belonging while on campus. Thus, the implications offer a better understanding of support and how it improves the experiences for Black women.

Implications for Practice

As the diversity at PWIs increases, there must be resources in place to support the growing demographic (Van Dyke & Tester, 2014). Recommendations for practice are determined by the participants' experiences at Incline University, specifically as it relates to campus support for Black women. The recommendations are as follows: 1. Invest more resources and tools in the multicultural affairs office for Black women. 2. Hire Black faculty and staff.

Finding support at PWIs has been challenging for Black women. Predominately White institutions invite Black women to enroll but have not considered or provided the necessary resources to help Black women become successful or to create a sense of belonging (Vickers, 2014). The administrators at Incline University lack adequate training to support this population of undergraduate students. Due to this phenomenon, forming relationships with White faculty, staff, and students was difficult.

The participants in this study expressed hesitation when trying to form any relationship or get support from the White administration. The women felt prejudged, burdened, and isolated. A way to advocate for their Black women undergraduate students is to provide diversity training to address the discrimination and inequalities from the White faculty and staff.

By enforcing mandatory diversity training for all university personnel at Incline University, White staff and faculty will be better equipped to support Black women. These faculty and staff need to be intentional about how they interact with the Black women and make them feel valued by offering them an equitable support system, as they provide to their White peers. The participants reported being treated as less than their White counterparts and thus made them feel they did not belong on campus.

The participants were not able to advocate for themselves because they felt the resistance from the White administration. This caused emotional strain on the women and highlighted the need for more resources to support Black women undergraduate students. The multicultural affairs office is a strong resource for these women, but a need exists for additional support and representation. The women would benefit from more resources that were directly related to addressing their issues and grievances. This resource needs to be flexible to support different groups of Black women, as each participant had her own unique perspective and experience.

Incline University's administration can implement a focus group that discusses specific programming efforts that highlight Black women and their culture. The programming can also be used to help the women feel part of the campus community and increase their sense of belonging (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). The more students feel connected to campus and appreciated, the more likely they will feel valued.

Another helpful strategy to increase sense of belonging on campus for Black women is to hire more Black staff and faculty. Due to having a shared experience, the participants shared that it was easier to approach or form relationships with Black faculty and staff. The relationships formed by the Black faculty and staff with the Black undergraduate students helped the students feel seen and appreciated. By hiring more Black professionals, Incline University would show their commitment to not only the participants but to diversifying the campus community (McManigell Grijalva, 2018).

When explaining the experiences on campus, the participants described how being a Black woman impacted how certain experiences either were or were not resolved. In regard to academics and receiving support from their professors, each participant had a lack of support and had to seek support elsewhere. The women sought support from other Black women peers or Black staff.

Unfortunately, the Black women peers and Black staff are limited with the type of support that they can offer. Therefore, the participants are forced to find support outside the classroom which is a major inconvenience. Black women shouldn't be forced to seek outside support when there is support that they pay for and deserve.

 Black women are constantly forced to go out of their way to obtain the resources they need. For example, Kiara discussed how she has to purchase her hair products off-campus because the products sold in the campus store are for White people. Black women do not feel valued on campus because they are constantly being reminded that they are not a priority at Incline University.

During the research study, the participants describe a disconnect between them and their White peers. They did not feel as empowered as their peers, valued, or supported. The lack of

support from the university administration negatively impacted these women's worth and did not acknowledge the various dynamics that are impacted by their exclusion. They were enrolled at the same university but lacked the tools to be successful. Thus, the participants felt inferior in comparison to their White peers. Being enrolled at Incline University was not the same as being valued or supported at Incline University. University administration lacked respect which impacts how other campus professionals interact with Black women.

For future reference, practitioners should take time to speak with the Black women on campus. Taking the time to be intentional about getting to know and understand these women will be a step towards improving their experience while on campus. Offering specific resources for Black women will positively impact their experience on campus and increase their sense of belonging.

Implications for Theory

Critical race theory is a theory that addresses how race, racism, and power impact relationships (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) included education within critical race theory and its racial impact on the inequalities that exists within the United States education system. In this research study, critical race theory was used to examine the lived experiences of Black women at a predominantly White institution.

Although CRT addresses race and gender, there needs to be a stronger focus on matters regarding race and gender. This theory fails to address all the implications of how gender can contribute to inequalities faced by Black women. For Black women, you must account for race and gender, as they cannot be separated when examining their lived experiences, because Black women are members of two marginalized groups. Their experiences reflect their positionality on campus and help to understand their experiences.

The participants in this research discussed how not even Black men understood their experience or showed them support. The Black women reported feeling undermined by their Black male peers. The participants in this study describe how their White peers and Black male counterparts are treated better than them by the White administrators.

Understanding the lived experiences of Black women through critical race theory requires the theory to expand to include gender, similar to Black feminist thought. When examining the Black woman's perspective, both race and gender must be accounted. For example, Lexi explained how being a woman and African American impacted how she is perceived on campus. She explained that not only is she discriminated against for being Black but also for being a woman. Lexi's experience offers insight into how Black women are treated on campus.

Incline University administrators can learn from the participants' experiences and improve the campus community. The university administrators have to be intentional about improving the experiences for Black women and approach them about their wants, needs, and concerns. Given that Black women did not feel they had the same experiences and support as their Black male counterparts, clear is the idea that Black men are considered superior to Black women. CRT does not allude to the concept that Black people are treated differently because of their gender. Because it does not represent their experiences, CRT cannot fully represent Black women. Adding an addendum that includes mention of Black women's specific and unique experience would help between understand their experiences, and thus the support they need in return.

Implications for Future Research

Current research about understanding the Black woman experience at predominantly White institutions is limited. There are few researchers who write about the lived experiences of Black women; however, there is extensive research about the overall Black and Black male experience.

The research surrounding African Americans at PWIs discusses diversity, racism, and micro-aggressions (Linley, 2018). Although this research is important to the field, more research is needed that pertains to Black women specifically.

Based on the findings of the study, two recommendations for future researchers are as follows: 1. Interview campus administrators. 2. Interview Black undergraduate men. Throughout the interviews, the participants discuss their perception of campus administration (faculty and staff) and their Black male peers. In order to understand how others view Black women, they must be asked about their perception and participation in the isolation of Black women. These perceptions and actions impact how the participants engaged with others on campus. Collecting the viewpoint from the administrators may aid in their overall understanding of what they believe Black women experience (Grant, 2012). Additionally, White campus administrators can reevaluate the support that they offer to Black women students and assess any disconnections.

Conclusion

In this research study, I explored the lived experiences of five Black women who are pursuing an undergraduate degree at Incline University. The study found that Black women lack support on campus which impacts how they engage with others and form relationships; ultimately, impacting their sense of belonging on campus. Based on the lack of support and poor treatment, Black women relied on each other and Black faculty and staff to be their support system.

Their racialized experiences encouraged them to bond with one another and provide support for one another as they navigated through a predominantly White institution. The participants expressed their gratitude for one another as these relationships became a major source of support while on campus. Due to the participants not being valued on campus, it was

another layer they had to battle while pursuing their degrees. Although they continually suffer on campus, they still succeed and remain resilient. Predominantly White institutions must offer intentional resources to support Black women and improve their experiences. This research study contributed to the body of research that discussed the lived experiences of Black women and how and they differ from their White and male counterparts at PWIs.

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Appendix A

Making Space and Place for African American Women at PWI's

Guiding Questions

1. When did you decide to attend Incline University and why?

2. In reflecting on your experiences as an African American woman at a PWI, what stands out most to you? Please begin with information from your freshmen year to now.

   a. How would you best make meaning of your experience?

3. How do you believe your race has affected your experiences at Incline University?

4. How have your experiences as an African American women student, made you feel included or excluded at Incline University?

5. How would you describe interactions with your peers, along race and gender lines?

6. Based on your experiences as an African American woman, what are your perceptions of supports needed at PWIs for this population?

7. Have you ever felt as if your gender has impacted your experience on campus? How so?

8. How do you believe being an African American woman has affected your experience at Incline University?

9. Have you ever felt that as an African American woman, you had to socialize or present yourself socially in a certain way?

10. If you were to re-enroll at Incline University today, what would you change about your experience?

Appendix B

Making Space and Place for African American Women at PWI's

Research Study Recruitment Email

Good Afternoon,

My name is Nubia Williams and I am a doctoral student at Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. I am contacting you, to invite you to participate in a study to discuss your experience(s) as an African American woman student at your university. This study will seek to understand your experiences in regard to race and issues of race within your campus community. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the effects race has on the experiences and sense of belonging for African American women students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Results from this study will be used to make recommendations to improve the resources and support services available to African American women students.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Nubia Williams willi127@duq.edu to complete the pre-interview questionnaire, which will collect general demographic information regarding you as a student.

Once selected to participate in this study, you will receive an email from me to schedule a 45- to 60-minute, one on one, virtual interview. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed with your permission. Prior to the interview, you will select a pseudonym, which will replace your name and maintain your confidentiality.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of participating.

Nubia Williams

Doctoral Student

Duquesne University

Appendix C

Making Space and Place for African American Women at PWI's

Invitation Email

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study to learn more about how race effects the experiences and sense of belonging for African American women students at predominantly White institutions. If you are still interested in participating in this study, respond to this email confirming your participation and 3 days/times you will be available for the interview.

Please note, your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Physical research data will be stored in a locked office and electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer that I own. Although this data will be published and presented in meetings your name and identifying information will not be revealed.

Prior to our schedule interview you will be asked to complete a consent form. This signed form will give the researcher (Nubia Williams) permission to use the information obtained for the purpose of the study. You may withdraw your consent and participation at any time. There are no personal benefits or consequences for participating or declining to participate in this research study. However, your participation benefits this study by: 1) helping university administrators better understand the experiences of African American women students and 2) assisting in improving the resources and support services provided to African American women students at PWIs.

Thanks in advance for your participation!

Nubia Williams

Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership

Duquesne University

Appendix D

Making Space and Place for African American Women at PWI's

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Please complete the questionnaire below and return it via email to Nubia Williams for consideration into this research study regarding the African American undergraduate women experience at your university.

1. What is your class status? Circle one

    Sophomore   Junior   Senior

2. Are you a transfer student?

    Yes or No

3. Have you lived on campus for the entirety of your enrollment at Incline University?

    Yes or No

4. Did you participate in the university's pre-orientation program for minority students?

    Yes or No

5. What is your major? _____

6. Are you part of a sports team?

    Yes or No

7. Are you a member or have you ever been a member of any organization(s) through the Office of Diversity and Inclusion?

    Yes or No

8. If you answered yes to #7 which organization(s)? _____

9. What race/ethnicity do you identify with? _____

10. What city and state do you reside in? _____

Appendix E

Participant

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

This form authorizes the *Principal Investigator* to release audio recordings, notes of observations and interviews for the purpose of transcription.

I am committed to keeping your information as confidential as possible. Any identifying information has already been removed from the mentioned sources. Please note, the transcriptionists are prohibited from sharing confidential information or using confidential information from the study for personal intent. The transcriptionists are also required to destroy or otherwise discard information in a secure manner.

By signing the document below, you grant us permission to release audio recordings, notes of observations and interviews for the purpose of transcription.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date:_____