

(RE)PRESENTING OURSELVES: CREATING AN
“OPPOSITIONAL BLACK AESTHETIC” AT
A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION:
A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Black female students that attend predominantly white¹ institutions face many challenges both academically and personally. While there is a growing body of literature related to the different factors that impact the success of Black female students at PWIs, there is a need for in-depth qualitative studies that focuses on the daily lived experiences of Black female students. Engaging Black female students in the creation of a critical space or “oppositional Black aesthetic” (bell hooks, 1995) is important for two reasons. First, it places an emphasis on the subjective nature of women’s empowerment through the use of a modified photovoice approach. Photovoice allows participants to use photographs in order to (re)present themselves and their experiences on their own terms. Second, taking photographs and combining them with personal narratives or stories allows offers Black female students at PWIs the opportunity to create counterhegemonic images that promote the new ways of knowing, thinking and being which is instrumental in gaining a better understanding of the lived experiences of Black women that attend PWIs.

¹ Throughout this dissertation the term “white” will not be capitalized. In Kimberlé Crenshaw’s text, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, she states the following: “I use Black and African American interchangeably throughout this article. I capitalize Black because Blacks, like Asians, Latinos and other minorities, constitute a specific cultural group and, as such, require denotation as a proper noun. By the same token, I do not capitalize white, which is not a proper noun, since whites do not constitute a specific cultural group”(1997, p. 94). While I am aware the Blacks have different experiences that are marked by signifiers for difference like race, gender, sexual orientation, and class, I maintain that they do represent a specific cultural group and qualify as a proper noun.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Vincent and Sandra Turner, you gave me everything and it was more than enough. The woman that I am today is because of your unconditional love and support. I also dedicate this dissertation to my brothers, Vincent Jr. and Micheal, thanks for always loving me and being there.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“All colonized and subjugated people who, by way of resistance, create an oppositional subculture within the framework of domination recognize that the field of representation (how we see ourselves, how others see us) is a site of ongoing struggle” (bell hooks, p. 179)

In her essay, *In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life* (1995b), bell hooks explores the importance of photography in the lives of Black people and its relationship with representation and identity. For bell hooks, representation or “control over images” (1995b, p. 179) remains a site of struggle for marginalized groups, particularly Blacks as a result of what she calls a lack of vigilance related to the “politics of representation” (1995b, p. 179). Considering this, bell hooks argues that in order to address this issue and move away from essentialized notions of identity and representation, we need to promote the creation of images that not only contradict the monolithic representations of Blacks, but also ones that are based on their daily lives and experiences. For bell hooks (1992), the issue here is representation:

...a fundamental task of Black critical thinkers has been the struggle to break with the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe, and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory.
(p. 2)

Therefore, it is necessary to develop new ways of not only describing Black life but also ways of seeing and thinking about these representations that moves beyond simply describing them in

favor of creating liberatory spaces. For bell hooks, photography is a useful tool for the production of these counterhegemonic images: “cameras gave to Black folks, irrespective of class, a means by which we could fully participate in the production of images” (1995b, p. 57)—images that are necessary for the creation of what she calls “an oppositional Black aesthetic” (1995b, p. 179).

Problem Statement:

While the number of Black female students attending PWIs is continuing to increase (Bailey-Fakhoury and Frierson, 2014; Strayhorn, 2011) recent studies have found that Black women attending PWIs have more problems with social and emotional issues than their counterparts that attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Bailey-Fakhoury and Frierson, 2014; Hesse-Biber, Livingstone, Ramirez, Barko & Johnson, 2010; Hamilton, 2009). Additional studies of Black women at the university level have focused on topics related to health issues, body image and/or comparing them with white women in higher education (see for example Abrams, Allen, & Gray, 1993; Gray, Ford & Kelly, 1987; Smith, Burlew, & Lundgren, 1991). Other studies have found that Black female college face issues related to social adjustment and social isolation (Levey et al., 1998; Rosales & Person, 2003). Additionally, other studies maintain that Black female students at the university level struggle academically and developmentally which has taken a toll on their health, both mentally and physically (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Comparative and quantitative in nature, the majority of these studies have typically focused on issues related to self-concept (Parham & Helms, 1985a; Parham & Helms, 1985b; Pyant & Yanico, 1991). Other studies of this nature have focused on challenges related to self-esteem (Crocker, 1999; Demo & Parker, 1987) while others focused on problems regarding body image (Bond & Cash, 2006; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998). While these studies offer

valuable information in terms of the factors that impact Black female students at PWIS, more in-depth studies need to be conducted that not only offer a glimpse into their lives but also an opportunity for them to (re)present their daily lives and experiences.

Considering this, the need for more in-depth research that focuses on the experiences of Black female students at PWIs is evident for a variety of reasons. First, they could shed light on the complex, multifaceted lives led by Black female college students at PWIs. Second, they could potentially be used to break “with the “hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being” (bell hooks, 1992, p. 2) that often times marginalize women of color at universities. Finally, they could potentially create a critical space that can “produce distinctive oppositional knowledges that embrace multiplicity yet remain cognizant of power” (Collins, 1998, p. 8). Ultimately, these projects would shed much needed light on the experiences of this particular group of women and offer insight into their lives and experiences—experiences that that may not be experienced by others.

Purpose and Scope of the Study:

The overarching goal of this study was to engage Black female college students that attend a PWI in a process to create a space for an “oppositional Black aesthetic” through the use of photography and storytelling. According to Deborah Willis (2002), “there has been a surge in interest in photography, especially in the ways one looks at and interprets photographs and how identity and representation are constructed in photographs of African Americans” (p. x). Considering this, the present study used photography and personal narratives to critically explore the relationship between image making and interpretation with subjectivity and representation in order to create a critical space to (re)present the daily lives and experiences of the Black women studied.

Creating an “Oppositional Black Aesthetic”:

According to Paul Taylor (2010), ‘Black aesthetics’ is the new name for “an old form of intellectual and cultural work” (p.1) that focuses on exploring how aesthetic practices benefit and/or restrict individuals looking to “create, maintain, navigate and understand the life-worlds and experiences of Black people” (Taylor, p.1). Black aesthetics, despite its longevity as a practice, has recently emerged as a way of using “art, analysis or criticism to explore the role that expressive objects and practices play in creating and maintaining Black life-worlds” (Taylor, 2010, p. 2). Traditionally, the term Black aesthetics is most closely associated with the writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance. Determined to find ways to express themselves without fear or shame, the writers of this period were concerned with how they could represent their lives in a way that did not distort what it meant to be Black. Influenced by an overt pride in being Black, the goal of the writers and artists of this period was to break with widely accepted, stereotypical representations of Black life. For example, Langston Hughes, in *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain* (1926), wrote:

...it is the duty of the younger Negro artist...to change through the force of his art that old whispering ‘I want to be white,’ hidden in the aspiration of his people, to ‘Why should I want to be White? I am a Negro—and beautiful.’

Unfortunately for Hughes and other writers and artists associated with the Harlem Renaissance later movements, the Black aesthetics movement described never fully materialized. According to Addison Gayle Jr., in his text *Black Aesthetics* (1971):

...the Renaissance writers lacked an aesthetic which might have given form and direction to their art. This lack of an aesthetic prevented them from producing new art forms, creating new images, and solving the problem of identity. (p. 84)

Fundamentally essentialist in nature, the black aesthetics movement associated with the Harlem Renaissance and subsequent movements, was unsuccessful in defining the criteria that represented a broad set of attitudes and experiences. In other words, the black aesthetics movement, despite its desire to represent “Black life-worlds” (Taylor, 2010, p. 2), failed to account for the diverse, complex lives led by blacks:

Rather than serving as a catalyst promoting diverse artistic expression, the Black Arts Movement began to dismiss all forms of cultural production by African-Americans that did not conform to movement criteria. Often this led to aesthetic judgements that did not allow for recognition of multiple Black experiences or the complexity of black life.... (bell hooks, 1995a, p. 68)

Failing to account for the multiple experiences faced by members of the Black community, artistic movements such as the Harlem Renaissance did little to produce works that moved beyond the dominant society’s understandings of beauty and desirability in artistic expression. In other words, while writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance desired to break away from tradition, “they realized that the models handed down to them from the White world were inadequate...yet they had little time to create new artistic forms.” (Gayle Jr., 1971, p. 84). In fact, most of the representations of Blackness created during this period adhered to the very racial stereotypes the movement aimed to challenge.

Even though the Harlem Renaissance and later movements were never able to fully conceptualize a notion of “black aesthetics”, some of the works created during these periods provide us with a good starting point for creating an “oppositional Black aesthetic”. First, their “insistence that all art is political” (bell hooks, 1995b, p. 68) speaks to their understanding of how works of art and cultural production are instrumental in challenging racist thinking by offering alternative ways of looking at “Black life-worlds” (Taylor, 2010, p. 2). Second, the works associated with the creation of a “black aesthetics” recognized that “art should be

functional, collective, and committed” (bell hooks, 1995a, p. 67). Finally, they understood the importance of “the encouragement of an aesthetic which did not separate habits of being from artistic production” (bell hooks, 1995a, p. 68). However, despite these understandings, the black aesthetics movement failed to create a “critical space where there could have been more open discussion of the relevance of cultural production” (bell hooks, 1995a, p. 68) and its relationship with dominance. The creation of this space is the primary concern of bell hooks in her writings:

I remain passionately committed to an aesthetic that focuses on the purpose and function of beauty, of artistry in everyday life, especially the lives of poor people, one that seeks to explore and celebrate the connection between our capacity to engage in critical resistance and our ability to experience pleasure and beauty. I want to create work that shares with an audience, the particularly oppressed and marginalized groups, the sense of agency artistry offers, the empowerment. (1995a, p. 71)

For bell hooks, “aesthetics is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming” (1995a, p. 65).

Therefore, bell hooks maintains that the focus is on learning to see: “Seeing here is meant metaphysically as heightened awareness and understanding, the intensification of one’s approach to experience reality through the realm of the senses” (1995a, p. 71).

Research Question:

The key question guiding this inquiry is as follows:

- 1) How do a group of Black women at a PWI use photography and personal narratives to navigate the challenges of creating an “oppositional Black aesthetic”?

Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical. First, it contributes to the existing research related to the experiences of Black female students at PWIs. Second, it contributes to the literature related to the subjectivity of women’s empowerment. Third, it

answers bell hooks' call for the creation of an "oppositional Black aesthetic" which focuses on the production of counterhegemonic images and new ways of seeing. Lastly, it demonstrates how participatory action research models like photovoice can be used to not only produce new images but also to offer an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the experiences of marginalized groups.

Theoretical Background:

Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical construct informs this study because it offers a space for Black women to appropriately explore their lives and experiences. It is also useful because it sheds light on the role that Black women have in their own knowledge production. Ultimately, Black Feminist Thought, through its focus on self-definition and empowerment, is instrumental in creating critical spaces that allow for the (re)presentation of the lives of the Black female college students studied.

Photography and Representation:

"There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you."
- Maya Angelou

As part of the exploration of the experiences and daily lives of the college-aged women selected for this project and how these experiences impact their identity construction process, this project used a modified photovoice method as its methodology. While the process itself is discussed in greater detail later, a brief discussion about photography and representation is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of the use of photography as a transformative tool for this project.

According to bell hooks, society in general and the Black Nationalist Movement in particular are responsible for ignoring one of the Black community's biggest assets in its struggle for equality when it comes to representation—photography. In her essay, *In Our Glory:*

Photography and Black Life (1995b), bell hooks maintains that photography is an important tool for Black liberation because it offers images/representations of Black life that contradict the readily accepted, though often times grossly inaccurate, image/representation of blackness endorsed by the dominant society:

Though rarely articulated as such, the camera became in Black life a political instrument, a way to resist misrepresentation as well as a means by which alternative images could be produced. Photography was more fascinating to masses of Black folk because it offered the possibility of immediate intervention, useful in the production of counter-hegemonic representations even as it was also an instrument of pleasure. The camera allowed Black folks to combine image making, resistance struggle, and pleasure. (bell hooks, 1995b, p. 180-181)

According to bell hooks, the images/representations promoted by white society represent what she calls the “social construction of Black identity” (1992, p. 45) In other words, the representations of Black lives and blackness that are dominant throughout society are the result of what appears to be natural and obvious to those in the dominant society but may or may not represent the reality of the people represented. Additionally, bell hooks (1992) states that the proliferation of these images/representations is the result of a desire to maintain white supremacy:

Long before white supremacists ever reached the shores of what we now call the United States, they constructed images of blackness that and Black people to uphold and affirm their racial superiority, their political imperialism, their will to dominate and enslave. From slavery on, white supremacists have recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination. (p. 2)

Similarly, Stuart Hall in his text *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990) argues that we must recognize the relationship between domination and representation in order to fully understand the relationship between the two.

The ways in which Black people, Black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects

of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization....They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as ‘Other’. (p. 225)

Recognizing the connection between domination and representation is essential as we begin to critically think about photos (and other forms of media) in an effort to develop what bell hooks calls “revolutionary attitudes” about representation (1992, p. 7)—revolutionary in the sense that we, both society as a whole and the Black community in particular, must learn to look at Black images differently. According to bell hooks, we have been taught to look at images of Black life and blackness with a colonizing eye and the only way to subvert these images is through the production of images that move beyond simply replacing them. In other words, it is not enough to simply take pictures; we must also critically write and talk about these images in an effort to construct meaning in and beyond a fixed understanding of representation.

Agentive Identities and Storytelling:

In order to move beyond the problematic representations of Black life and blackness in photos, the present study focused on the use of multi-modal ways of creating agentive identities that combine photography with storytelling or the production of narratives. There is a great deal of research that discusses the importance of narratives and their role in the production of agentive identities (Bruner, 1994; Hull, 2003; Miller, Mintz, Hoogstra, Fung & Potts, 1992; Ochs & Capps, 1996). In particular, these studies focus on the role that storytelling, an essential component of Black Feminist Thought, plays in the socialization and self-construction process of individuals and draws attention to the dynamic nature of narrative practices, the role of reflection and the impact that a person’s environment has on their identity construction process.

Challenging conceptions of fixed meaning and unified subjectivity, poststructural feminism (Weedon, 1997) argues that identity manifests itself as a result of the socially and culturally mediated experiences of individuals. According to Weedon (1999), identity is constructed “in the

social interactions between culturally produced contradictory subjects” (p. 107). Stuart Hall, again in his text *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), makes a similar argument when discussing cultural identity. According to Hall (1990), identity is not fixed and is constantly be produced: “...perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact...we should think instead of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (p. 222) In other words, identity is produced as a result of a wide range of discursive practices which not only give meaning to experiences but also highlight their often times contradictory and conflicting nature—an element that will be essential to gaining a better understanding of the multi-faceted, complex experiences faced by college-aged Black female students at a PWI.

Research Methodology:

Considering that the aim of this project was to engage Black female students in the process of creating a critical space for discussing their lives and experiences, this study was informed by techniques used in photovoice or participatory photography projects. Considering this, it was necessary to briefly discuss photography and its role in research. After a discussion about photography in research and photovoice, the particulars of the current research project are outlined.

Photography and Research:

Rooted in anthropology, the use of photography as a tool for collecting data in research is not new (see Collier, 1957; Collier & Collier, 1986). First used by researchers to capture images during their fieldwork data collection phase (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998), photography allowed researchers to record their observations quickly and the pictures that were produced provided researchers with “extra-somatic memory” during the analytical phase of the research project

(Prosser & Schwartz, 1998, p. 122). Eventually, researchers began to see the value of using photos in research and they began using them in interviews with participants to encourage dialogue while exploring the meaning behind the photos taken. Collier (1975), a pioneer in using photos as part of the research process, found that using photos helped trigger the memories of the participants while reducing the fatigue and misunderstandings that often times occur during interviews. In recent years, researchers have moved beyond taking pictures of what they observe and have moved towards involving participants in the process of taking photos in order to create a more personal, insider perspective. Over the years researchers have used photography in a variety of ways. For example, photo elicitation (Harper, 2002), auto photography (Aitken & Wingate, 1993; Noland, 2006), auto driving (Clark, 1999), participant photography (Miller & Harpell, 2006), and photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) are all examples of how photography has been used as part of the research process.

Photovoice:

Among the approaches mentioned above, photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) combines photography and a grassroots approach to facilitate social action by helping people visually represent their lives. Developed by Wang and Burris as a participatory research tool, photovoice was first used to document the challenges women faced in terms of their reproductive health. According to Wang and Burris (1997) the purpose of photovoice is threefold: “1) to enable people to record and reflect on their community’s strengths and concerns, 2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs, 3) to reach policymakers (p. 370).” A type of participatory action research, photovoice “puts cameras in the hands of individuals often excluded from decision-making processes in order to capture their voices and visions about their lives, their community,

and their concerns” (Foster-Fishman et al, 2005, p. 277). Building on the concept of storytelling, using photovoice for this project encouraged the Black female college students involved in the project to take pictures of their daily lives and surroundings that are significant to them.

Research Design:

For the purposes of this research project, a modified photovoice method was used. In other words, the photovoice process used for this project was modified in order to meet the particular needs of this project. However, despite using a modified approach to the photovoice method, this project still focused on the production of images that not only represent the experiences of the Black women studied but also ones that can be used to replace problematic, often times externally defined representations of Black women at the university level. Additionally, the photographs and personal narratives collected as part of the photovoice method served as a way of creating a space for an “oppositional Black aesthetic.”

Data Collection:

The sample for this study included Black, female undergraduate students at a flagship university in the South. A four-phase approach was used to collect data for this project. The first phase of this project focused on obtaining IRB approval followed by recruitment. During the second phase, participants participated in one-on-one, preliminary interviews. Initial interviews with each participant were semi-structured and took place either face-to-face or online via Skype. The format of this portion of the interview process included the use of an interview schedule which provided flexibility during the interview. While a few of the questions (those related to pertinent biographical information) were close-ended and specific, the majority of the questions used during the initial interview were open-ended in order to allow the participants to be as open about their experiences as possible. After the initial interviews, participants then participated in a

photovoice workshop where they were trained in how to use the digital cameras they are expected to use during the project. During phase three, participants took photos that they felt responded to the issues discussed during their initial interview. Additionally, a secondary interview took place to allow each participant to explore the meanings of their photographs. In addition to discussing the photos taken, students were given the opportunity to discuss their personal experiences beyond what was photographed. The final phase of the data collection process involved participants recording personal narratives based on the photographs they collected. This part of the process allowed students to use their own words to describe what their photos meant as well as the opportunity to reflect on their experiences as students.

Study Limitations:

No research method is perfect and that applies to this project as well. While the current study maintains that the benefits of using photography outweigh its limitations, it is important to consider the limitations of using photovoice. First, using photography as part of the research process can be problematic because it limits discussions to what is observable (Rose, 1993). According to Castleden, Garvin, Huu-ay-aht First Nation (2008), “access to that which was not photographed is denied and subsequently not discussed in the photovoice interview” (p. 1402). Considering this, the format of the secondary interview was intentionally structured to allow participants to discuss other issues not captured during the photo-taking process. Additionally, the personal narratives were used to further overcome this limitation.

Another limitation of using photography as part of the research process is related to issues of photographing things and/or issues that are considered non-tangible (Castleden, 2008). For example, students may find it difficult to photograph or document issues surrounding their

marginalized status. In order to overcome this limitation, a strong emphasis on creativity during the photo-taking process was encouraged.

Summary:

This chapter provided an overview of the current project including the purpose and scope of the study, the background to the study, the research question to be answered and the significance of the study. Additionally, this chapter briefly explored the theoretical background as well as the research methodology that informed the study. Chapter II provides a more in-depth overview of Black Feminist Thought starting with a discussion of its theoretical underpinnings. After exploring the origins of Black Feminist Thought, Chapter II turns its attention to describing Black Feminist Thought and identifying its key tenets. Chapter III of the dissertation explores the methodology used for this project. After a discussion about the importance of photography for research purposes, Chapter III provides an overview of the photovoice method followed by a description of the modified photo voice approach adopted for this project. Chapter IV provides a thematic overview of the stories and photographs collected by the participants during the project. And finally, Chapter V discusses the implications of the findings as well as recommendations for future research.

Definitions of Terms:

In the following study, the following terms as used as follows:

Black aesthetics: For the purposes of this study, Black aesthetics refers to more than just an artistic movement. Often times used as an umbrella term to describe work by all Black artists and intellectuals under the African diaspora, the term is used in this study to refer to the desire for self-determination as opposed to an acceptance of externally defined stereotypical representations of Blackness.

Marginalization: Social exclusion that confines members of certain groups to the edges or margins of society, resulting in vulnerable populations and societal disparities. Often times viewed in terms of the Other, people in these groups tend to be underrepresented, ignored and/or silenced. (Clandinin, 2007; Lyman & Cowley, 2007).

Oppositional: Refers to the act of opposing or resisting.

Participatory Action Research: “A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview...[and bringing] together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and communities.” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 47)

Personal Narrative: Often times used to describe written accounts, the term is being used in this study to refer to oral accounts of personal experience(s) prepared and recorded by participants.

Photovoice: “Photovoice is a process by which people can identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique.” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369).

Race: A problematic term, the term is race is being used in this study to refer to observable features such as skin color that has been used to define certain groups of people.

Universal Black Woman: Belief that all Black women think, act, and experience the same things in the same way

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Challenging power structures from the inside, working the cracks within the system, however, requires learning to speak multiple languages of power convincingly.”
(Collins, 2012, p. xiii)

Theoretical Framework:

Black Feminist Thought provides useful tools for investigating traditional research methods related to Black women in general. More importantly, for the purposes of this paper, the use of this frameworks provided opportunities to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Black female students at PWIs. By creating spaces that promote different ways of knowing, thinking, and being, the present study used Black Feminist Thought to explore how intersecting oppressions like race, class and gender impact the experiences of Black female students as well as how they represent themselves.

The purpose of the current chapter was to explore Black Feminist Thought and discuss how it was used to properly discuss the experiences of the students selected for the study. In order to do this, it was important to explore the historical context of the movements as well as highlight the important features of Black Feminist Thought that are essential to this project. Considering this, the current chapter provides a historical overview of the intellectual traditions leading to Black Feminist Thought. Additionally, this chapter discusses key elements of Black

Feminist Thought in order to gain a better understanding of how it was used explore the lives and experiences of Black female college students at PWIs.

Black Feminist Traditions:

In order to adequately describe the experiences faced by Black female college students at PWIs, this research project used Black Feminist Thought as its primary theoretical framework. Any research that focuses on the lives and experiences of females would be remiss not to consider the importance of feminism because it offer a space for the negotiation of an identity appropriate to their daily lives and experiences. While feminism offers a site for negotiating identities for most women, it is not the case for all women. Much of the feminist discourse that characterizes our understanding of the lives of women claims to take into consideration the experiences of all females; however, the lives and experiences of Black women have not only been left out of the discussion but in many cases negated (bell hooks 1984; Hood 1978; Collins 2009). This section of the chapter demonstrates how the lives and experiences of Black women have not only been left out of the discussion but in many cases negated. In order to do this, it is necessary to briefly explore the academic discourse related to feminism. More importantly, this section explores the history of Black Feminist Traditions² and how it serves as a way to interrupt dominant notions of feminism and details how a Black Feminist Thought perspective is useful in exploring the complicated lives and experiences of the Black college-aged female students that will participate in this study.

² The term Black Feminist Traditions will be used in this chapter to refer to the various movements that have led to what is often times referred to as the Black Feminist Movement.

Feminist Traditions- A Brief History:

A brief exploration of the current academic discourse related to feminism is necessary in order to properly discuss the marginalized status of Black females. Before this exploration can take place, feminism as an academic discourse must be defined. In its most basic understanding, feminism is the belief that men and women have equal rights politically, economically, and socially. According to Baumgardner and Richards (2000), feminism is characterized by the following: “it is a movement” with specific goals that are both political and social—goals that ultimately allow women to make informed decisions about the lives they live. In other words, “feminism wants you to be whoever you are—but with a political consciousness”(Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, pp. 56-57). Again, these definitions offer very basic understandings of the term feminism but provide a good starting point for exploring the history of dominant feminist discourse. A brief discussion about the history of feminism is necessary because it demonstrates how Black women have been excluded from dominant feminist discourse.

The starting point of our discussion about the history of feminism starts with what is often times referred to as the “first wave³” of feminism. Initially concerned with access and equal opportunities in the context of “industrial society and liberal politics”(Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006, p. 1), first-wave feminism became known for gaining voting rights for women. In the beginning stages, the politics of first-wave feminism was related to other reform movements such as abolition and the temperance movement (Ryan, 1992; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Kosut, 2012). As a result of this relationship, a great deal of support came from Black abolitionist

³ The use of the wave metaphor within the feminist movement became widely used beginning in the late 1960s to describe the “second wave” or period of time between the 1960s and 1980s. While there has been a lot of debate surrounding whether or not this metaphor is useful, it will be used in this chapter because of its prevalence when discussing the feminist movement. In other words, the use of this term is not indicative of my acceptance of the use of the metaphor but instead indicates a decision to keep with the rhetoric that is often times used to discuss the history of the feminist movement.

women such as Sojourner Truth, Maria W. Stewart and Frances E.W. Harper (Zimmerman, 2000). Once first-wave feminists began to understand the importance of voting and the role disenfranchisement played in their reformatory efforts, the focus of the movement moved beyond attempts to abolish slavery to gaining voting rights for women. While this “wave” involved a wide range of women from various political and economic backgrounds, Black women were ultimately excluded from participating in the movement because it was feared that the racist attitudes of Southern voters would negatively impact the women’s movement (Henry, 2004).

Focusing more on offering women choices when it came to their daily lives and bodies, the “second wave” of feminism began during the late 1960s as a response to the lives women were living after World War II⁴—lives that made it necessary for women to work outside the home instead of as the more traditional “happy homemaker” (Friedan, 1963). Characterized as being a more radical form of feminism, second-wave feminism focused its attention on the use of birth control pills⁵, abortion, and reproductive rights for women. Similar to first-wave feminism, this “second wave” cannot be separated from other movements of the time: the anti-Vietnam movement, the gay and lesbian rights movement and the civil rights and Black power movements⁶. Even though this wave of feminism was related to the civil rights and Black power movements, Black women still found themselves left out of the conversation due to prevalence

⁴ During World War II, women were recruited by the government to assist in the war effort by working outside the home. While women have always worked, especially minority and lower-class women, a new sense of patriotism and economic incentives provided certain women with a newfound freedom.

⁵ The use of birth control pills as a form of contraception was approved in 1960 by the Food and Drug Administration.

⁶ While each of these movements were different, they were united by the notion of identity politics. In a nutshell, identity politics maintains that it is important to associate with members from other groups who share similar experiences as a result of their group affiliation (Ryan, 2001). According to Scholz (2012), “identity politics was a reaction to the solidarity or sisterhood grounded in shared experience as well as a future attempt to obtain social, legal, intellectual and economic rights for oppressed peoples.”

of essentialist notions of femininity that promoted a universal female identity—an identity based on the experiences of middle-and-upper class White women (Henry, 2004).

Beginning sometime during the 1980s, the “third wave” of feminism has been described as being the most inclusive of all the “waves” (McClellan, 2009; Zack, 2005). Seen as being a response to the perceived failures and triumphs of second-wave feminism, third-wave feminism was not meant to diminish the work done by the previous waves. According to Katherine Rake (2006):

A lot of them [issues being discussed by contemporary feminists] are old issues but they have emerged anew, I think what we’re hearing about it, I think a lot of younger women are into issues around personal safety, around body image, around the saturation of pornography in society, which are all actually old issues but I think they have got a special urgency given what’s happening, given the Internet, media and all the rest of that that gives it a special push at the moment. (interview)

Even though the issues were the same, one area that was different was the recognition of women that had previously been left out of the previous movements—women of different races and nationalities. Through the creation of a space that sought to pay attention to race-related subjectivities, “third wave” feminism offered women of color a space that they could use to bring attention to their plight which was a result of their race (Anzaldúa, 2007; bell hooks, 1989).

Although “third wave” feminism’s goal was to offer a more diverse group of women the opportunity to participate in feminist practice, its focus on individualism has prevented the movement from fully achieving this goal. According to Kathleen P. Iannello (2010), “third wave feminism is not thought of as an activist movement...because there doesn’t seem to be a collective identity” (p.71). In other words, “third wave” feminism promoted individual advancement over group opportunity which goes against the majority of social movement theory that highlights the importance of a collective identity. Therefore, while it seems that third wave feminism would be an appropriate space for Black women to voice their frustrations, “third

wave” feminism still failed to account for the complex, multifaceted lives that Black women live (see Chambers, 1995; Henry, 2004; Morgan, 1999; Yee, 2011) because of its assumption that women as individuals possessed the ability to achieve equality without significantly, if at all, altering society—a society that up until the point of the “third-wave” failed to even recognize the plight of Black women.

Black Feminist Traditions- A Brief History:

Before a discussion about the Black Feminist Movement and its impact can take place, it is necessary to explore the history related to the movement in order to adequately explore the challenges that Black women have faced in terms of being recognized not only by the dominant society but within their own community as well. The origins of what has become known as the Black Feminist Movement can be traced back to the Women’s Movement and Black Liberation Movement⁷ (Hull, Scott & Smith, 1982; Gallagher & Lippard, 2014). Developed in order to meet the complex needs of Black women who felt they were oppressed in terms of race within the “traditional” feminist movement and sexually oppressed within the Black Liberation Movement, Black feminism argues that sexism, class oppression, and racism are related and cannot be separated or privileged over one another. (Hull, Scott & Smith, 1982; Gallagher & Lippard, 2014) The Black Feminist Movement was developed in order to create theory that deals with this interconnectedness by moving beyond dominant forms of feminism that usually focused on overcoming sexism and class oppression while ignoring racial issues.

⁷ The term Black Liberation Movement is being used as an umbrella term that includes various movements for Black liberation. These movements include, but are not limited to, the following: the Civil Rights Movement, Black Nationalism and the Black Panthers Movement.

Black Women in the Feminist Movement:

Black women have been involved in the feminist movement since the beginning as detailed in the previous section. The Black women that have been active in this movement, regardless of when they participated, have often times been met with racism. Traditionally, feminist theorists have attempted to address the relationship between race and feminism in one of two ways. On the one hand, feminist theories have argued for what is known as the additive approach to oppression: "...starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class, and religion" (Collins, 2009b). On the other hand, some feminist theories have chosen not to view race and gender as separate entities but instead treat them as mutually constitutive. In other words, they choose to focus on how signifiers of difference interact with one another. Of the two approaches, the additive approach is not only the most popular but it is also the most problematic. Privileging gender over other categories of difference makes it difficult for the experiences of Black women to be adequately situated within dominant feminist theory. Regardless of their participation in the Women's movement since the very beginning, Black women have not been equally represented within the feminist movement. Their exclusion can be explained in two ways: 1) the promotion of a universal woman and 2) the presence of an anti-racist female tradition. Exploring the presence of these attitudes is essential in gaining a better understanding of the frustrations Black women have suffered as participants of the more dominant feminist movement.

Although White feminists pride themselves on moving beyond assigning characteristics that are essential to defining what a woman is, they have fallen victim to the trap and produce essentialist definitions of womanhood. A good example of this can be seen in the influential text, *The Feminist Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan. Credited as sparking the beginning of what is

known as the “second wave” of feminism, this text argued that “women suffered under pervasive systems of delusions and false values under which they were urged to find personal fulfillment, even identity, vicariously through the husbands and children they were expected cheerfully to devote their lives” (Feminist and Gender Theories, p. 317). While her text was instrumental in bringing attention to the problems faced by middle-class White women, she failed to pay attention to the plight of non-White women. Although Friedan’s intention was to focus on the experiences of a certain group of women, she made claims about all women and in the process completely negated the experiences of non-White women. Whether intentional or not, conflating the experiences of all women with the women described in her text fails to recognize their privilege in terms of their race and socioeconomic status. bell hooks (1984), in her critique against the origins of feminist theory, pushes against the presence of a universal woman based on White women’s experiences and daily lives. According to bell hooks, works by writers such as Friedan and others that “represent” feminist theory “never emerged from women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually—women who are powerless to change their condition in life”(hooks, 1984, pp. 1-2).

The failure to differentiate between the experiences of middle-class white women and non-white women could be explained in a variety of ways. One of the most important of these possible explanations is the presence of an anti-racist female tradition, different than Friedan’s omission of race, which acknowledges that feminist theory does in fact recognize race. For example, Adrienne Rich argues that:

...It is important for white feminists to remember that—despite lack of constitutional citizenship, educational deprivation, economic bondage to men, laws and customs forbidding women to speak in public or to disobey fathers, husbands, and brothers—our white forefathers have, in Lillian Smith’s words, repeatedly been “disloyal to civilization” and have “smelled death in the word ‘segregation’,” often defying patriarchy for the first time, not on their own behalf but for the sake of black men, women, and

children. We have a strong anti-racist female tradition despite all efforts by the white patriarchy to polarize its creature-objects, creating dichotomies of privilege and caste, skin color, and age and condition of servitude. (as cited in bell hooks, 2015, p. 125)

For many white feminists like Rich, the unwillingness to admit the presence of a racist female tradition stems from the belief that members of one oppressed group cannot oppress others. In other words, white women who are oppressed as a result of their gender cannot oppress other marginalized groups. If we consider the history of the women's rights movement we will find little evidence to support Rich's claim. For example, while the "first wave" of feminism was tied to the abolishment of slavery, white feminists, motivated primarily by religious reasons⁸ attacked slavery as an institution and not racism itself. In fact, once they saw that their association with abolishing slavery could ultimately undermine their efforts of gaining voting rights for white women they distanced themselves and excluded Black feminists (Henry, 2004).

In the end, the exclusion of Black feminists from dominant feminist discourse can be explained in numerous ways. Regardless of the reasons for their exclusion, it is clear that what we think of as feminism is unwilling to accommodate the experiences of non-white women—women who not only had to fight to eradicate the race discrimination they faced in the Women's movement, but to fight issues related to gender discrimination within the Black community.

Black Women in the Black Liberation Movement:

While the different movements that have fought for the liberation of Black people have occurred at different points throughout the history of this country, Black women have been an integral part of each movement. However, despite their involvement Black women have been discriminated against within Black Liberation Movements based on their gender. Even though

⁸ Many of the first abolitionists were Quakers. According to their religious beliefs, slavery was wrong and as a result, they worked to help runaway slaves gain their freedom.

these various movements fought for the freedom of all Blacks there was an underlying assumption that equated freedom with manhood. Based on this assumption, the idea that racism was more harmful to Black men than Black women became prevalent:

The idea [was] that Blackness was by far more difficult and energy-draining than femaleness... Both racism and sexism exploit Black women... Racism, however, destroys Black women, Black men and their offspring... Sexism enslaves, racism destroys... [Racism] destroys [Black] culture and prevents [Blacks] from maintain economically and socially stable communities. (as cited in Bell & Blumenfeld, 1995, p. 28)

As a result of this line of thinking, Black women not only found themselves excluded from leadership positions but also controlled by Black men in terms of their sexuality.

In terms of leadership roles within the various Black Liberation Movements, Black women's influence while unofficial was instrumental in achieving the goals of the different causes. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement women "were often the ones who initiated protest, formulated strategies and tactics, and mobilized other resources (especially money, personnel, and communication networks) necessary for successful collective action"(Barnett, 1993, p. 163). This sentiment is evidenced by the following comments about the role of southern Black women:

When you're dealing with Black men and women and the fragile position of Black males, you can expect that Black women, even though they might do all the work, will not be recognized as doing the work or leading anything...In the South, women still look to men as leaders when women are actually doing the work. ... A lot of this comes from traditions of the church and the male minister as the leader, the person whom you're supposed to obey. The movement was no different than anything else. Women obeyed and supported their husbands, looked up to them as leaders, and didn't take any credit even if it was offered... Black women especially had to work hard, but never ever threaten the fragile position of their Black men. They still have to do this. (Barnett, 1993, p. 175)

Scholarship that has focused on the various Black Liberation Movements has paid very little attention to these women and their leadership roles and instead chose to focus on the male

leaders associated with each movement (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977; Oberschall, 1981; Rose and Grenya, 1984). As previously mentioned, the Black Liberal Movements equated freedom for Blacks with manhood and this is evident when discussing the exclusion of Black women from leadership positions within these movements.

Another tactic used to oppress Black women within the Black Liberation Movements was by controlling Black women's sexuality. According to Collins (1990), "[B]lack men overemphasize[d] white male sexual exploitation of [B]lack womanhood..." (p. 289) while at the same time failing to recognize how they themselves exploited Black women for their personal gain. Examples of this can be found in many of the sexist statements made by Black men involved in the various movements—statements that were not only accepted but never criticized for their sexist undertones. For example, Eldridge Cleaver (1968) wrote:

I became a rapist. To refine my technique and modus operandi, I started out by practicing on black girls in the ghetto -- in the black ghetto where dark and vicious deeds appear not as aberrations or deviations from the norm, but as part of the sufficiency of the Evil of the day-- and when I considered myself smooth enough,

I cross the tracks and sought out white prey. I did this consciously, deliberately, willfully, methodically-though looking back I see that I was in a frantic, wild, and completely abandoned frame of mind. (p. 26)

While he would eventually express remorse for his actions, this quote is a good example of how the violation of Black women is considered less serious than that of white women. The statement provided here is only one instance of the sexist attitudes that Black women had to endure and while it doesn't speak specifically to women that participated in the Black Liberation Movements, it still provides us with a good example of the attitudes of Black men about Black women.

Origins of Black Feminist Traditions:

Faced with combatting the sexism they encountered as participants of the Black Liberation Movements and the racism they encountered within the feminist movement, Black women found themselves silenced and desperate for a movement that met their needs as Black women committed to social justice. Pinpointing the exact origins of Black Feminist Traditions is rather difficult. On the one hand, it can be argued that current Black Feminist Traditions can be traced back to the work of Black abolitionists. On the other hand, it could be argued that their origins are more recent. Regardless of when they started, Black Feminist Traditions have taken many forms. This section of the chapter will briefly explore a few of these traditions in order to demonstrate how Black feminist writers have developed theories that allow them to situate their unique, complex experiences within the context of the lives led by Black women.

Black Feminist Traditions: A Brief Survey

While each of the movements that make up the Black Feminist Traditions vary in their approach, a few common themes can be identified. According to Black feminists, a critique of the exclusion of Black women from dominant feminist traditions and its problematic nature is also discussed in many of the writings that characterize the Black feminist writings.

Additionally, the creation of a space that offers Black feminist writers the opportunity to describe their experiences within a context that recognizes how the signifiers of difference previously mentioned intersect is another common theme found among the writings found within the Black Feminist Traditions (see bell hooks, 1999; Collins, 1990; Lorde, 2007; Walker, 1983).

Organized in 1974, the National Black Feminist Organization was one of the first organizations founded in order to address the issues previously mentioned. While it only lasted three years as an organization, it laid the groundwork for a centralized Black Feminist

Movement. Another example of an organization that worked to address these issues was the Combahee River Collective. Formed a year after the National Black Feminist Organization, this group was originally created as an organized space for Black feminists and lesbians. Issued by the Combahee River Collective in 1977, the Combahee River Collective Statement is an important statement of Black feminism. According to the group, the following points define their cause and ultimately, Black Feminist Traditions: 1) a commitment to fighting race, sex, and class oppression, 2) as Black feminists, they struggle alongside Black men to fight racism, but against Black men to fight sexism, 3) freedom for Black women would ensure freedom for everyone because that would mean that all systems of oppression had been destroyed, and 4) a commitment to examining the politics that impact them including the racism and exclusion they face within dominant feminist traditions.

Ten years after the founding of the National Black Feminist Organization, author Alice Walker (1983) used the term womanism to define the feminist work of Black women authors.

According to Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005), womanism is a:

...theoretical perspective focused on the experiences and knowledge bases of Black women, womanism both recognizes and interrogates the social realities of slavery, segregation, sexism, and economic exploitation this group has experienced during its history in the United States. Furthermore, womanism examines these realities and Black women's responses without viewing them as a variation on or derivation of Black male or White female behavior and social circumstances.

(p. 437)

In addition to providing a definition of womanism, Beauboeuf-Lafontant also points out that not all Black women are womanists in the same manner that not all women are feminists (p. 437).

Ultimately, womanism embraces the gendered struggles of Blacks while simultaneously differentiating between other notions of feminist and Black feminist traditions however, womanism, according to Collins, "exaggerates out-group differences and minimizes in-group

variation by assuming a stable and homogenous racial group identity” (as cited in Alexander-Floyd and Simien, 2006, p. 68). While this work offers a critique of Walker’s notion of womanism, it continues the work started by the National Black Feminist Organization and the other Black feminists previously discussed and added to the discourse related to the plight of Black women.

Black Feminist Thought:

Influenced by the literary traditions made popular by Black women like bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Alice Walker, in addition to the lived experiences of everyday Black women, Collins’ text *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) provides a point of departure in terms of focus when compared with the work of Walker. By focusing on the multiple experiences that Black women have, *Black Feminist Thought* offers a space for exploring the “subjugated knowledge of a Black women’s standpoint” (Collins, 1999, p. 252) due to the fact that black women, “like other subordinate groups...have not only developed a distinctive Black women’s standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge” (Collins, 1990, p. 202). Considering this, this section of the chapter discusses three important elements of Black Feminist Thought. Additionally, this section explores how each of these elements are important in the exploration of the lives of Black female college students at a PWI.

Unlike the “mainstream” feminist movements previously discussed, theories that fall under Black feminist traditions, in general and Black Feminist Thought, in particular focus on a Black woman’s standpoint—a standpoint that pays attention to a unique point of view for and by Black women. Before a discussion of the three elements mentioned above can take place, it is necessary to briefly discuss the assumptions that inform Black Feminist Thought. First, Black

Feminist Thought, though it may be recorded by others, is produced by Black women. Second, Black Feminist Thought assumes that Black women, as a result of their position within society, possess a unique standpoint that is collective and recognizes that “there will be certain commonalities of perception shared by Black women as a group” (Collins, 1986, p. S16). Third, despite the presence of a collective standpoint, Black Feminist Thought recognizes that “while living as Black women may produce certain commonalities of outlook, the diversity of class, region, age and sexual orientation shaping individual Black women’s lives has resulted in different expressions of these common themes (Collins, 1986, p. S16). And finally, Black Feminist Thought “contains observations and interpretations about Afro-American womanhood that describe and explain different expressions of common themes” (Collins, 1986, p. S16).

All of the assumptions mentioned above speak to Collins’ assertion that black women function within an “outsider-within” position due to their “special standpoint on self, family and society” (1986, p. S14). Focusing on this unique standpoint is useful when considering the lives and experiences of Black female college students that attend PWIs, especially when we consider the following elements: the importance of self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression and the importance of Black women’s culture. (Collins, 1986). While these elements are not exhaustive, they best represent not only the underlying purpose of Black Feminist Thought but also the present study.

Self-Definition and Self-Valuation:

According to Collins, Mae King (1973) and Cheryl Gilkes (1981), an important task of Black women intellectuals is to examine the importance of stereotypes in order to understand the significance of Black women’s self-definition. For King, Black women have suffered as a result of controlling images that have been externally-defined. Similarly, Gilkes maintains that Black

women, as a punishment for threatening the status quo, have had to suffer under externally-defined definitions of Black womanhood in order to control them. Considering this, it is important to carefully examine these externally defined images in order to address the power dynamics that the process of self-definition exposes:

When Black women define themselves, they clearly reject the taken-for-granted assumptions that those in positions granting them the authority to describe and analyze reality are entitled to do so. Regardless, of the actual content of Black women's self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects (Collins, 1986, p. S17).

While related to the notion of self-definition, self-valuation goes a step further than just recognizing the power dynamics involved in defining oneself and focuses on the "actual content of these self-definitions" (Collins, 1986, p. S17). In other words, the focus here is on valuing aspects of Black womanhood that are "stereotyped, ridiculed, and maligned in academic scholarship and the popular media" (Collins, 1986, p. S17) in order to shed light on how dominate groups control others through the proliferation of externally-defined representations of Black womanhood.

Both of these elements of Black Feminist Thought are important for two reasons. First, defining and valuing one's self is an important step in "resisting the dehumanization essential to systems of domination" (Collins, 1986, p. S18). In other words, by focusing on self-definition and self-valuation, Black women challenge their status as the Other from what Collins describes as the objectified other (1986, p. S18). Second, these elements are important because of their importance in rejecting internalized psychological oppression (Baldwin, 1980). According to Collins, a Black woman's self-esteem can be damaged a great deal as a result of frequent attacks on her womanhood due to controlling images.

The Interlocking Nature of Oppression:

A second key theme that shows up in works that fall under Black Feminist Thought is that of exploring how markers of difference like race, gender, and class intersect. While the saliency of these types of oppression have varied greatly, the link between them has been a key element of Black Feminist Thought since its inception (Collins, 1990). For Black feminists, the ability to address multiple forms of oppression has been difficult because “mainstream” feminist movements as well as other movements like the Civil Rights Movement have not offered appropriate spaces for exploring how these markers intersect and how they impact Black women (Hull, Scott & Smith, 1982; Gallagher & Lippard, 2014).

Focusing on the interlocking nature of oppression (Collins, 1990) is important for two reasons. First, it helps Black feminists explore how multiple forms of oppression interact instead of privileging one over another. Undertaking a holistic approach to exploring oppression allows us to move beyond the either/or dualistic thinking that pervades traditional modes of inquiry. Second, Black Feminist Thought’s focus on the interlocking nature of oppression promotes an alternative view of society that is universal. According to Collins (1986), “Black Feminists who see the simultaneity of oppression affecting Black women appear to be more sensitive to how these same oppressive systems affect Afro-American men, people of color, women, and the dominant group itself” (Collins, 1986, p. S21). In other words, focusing on how markers of difference intersect is important not only for Black women but for everyone within society.

The importance of Afro-American Women’s Culture:

A third key element of Black Feminist Thought involves redefining and explaining the culture of the Black women. Placing value on Black women’s culture has been instrumental in exploring previously ignored areas related to Black female experience. Additionally, it has

allowed for the identification of “concrete areas of social relations where Afro-American women create and pass on self-definitions and self-evaluations essential to coping with simultaneity of oppression they experience” (Collins, 1986, p. S21). Created and modified as a result of material conditions, Black women’s culture is helpful not only in exposing how different forms of expression intersect, but also negates the presences of a monolithic Black woman’s experience. According to Collins (1986), themes related to Black womanhood are experienced differently:

While common themes may link Black women’s lives, these themes will be experienced differently by Black women in different historical settings. Thus, there is no monolithic Black women’s culture—rather, there are socially-constructed Black women’s cultures that collectively form Black women’s culture. (p. S22)

In other words, this approach moves beyond traditional understandings of culture that place an emphasis on the “unique, ahistorical values of a particular group” (Collins, 1986, p. S21).

A focus on the culture of Black women is important for three reasons. First, it deals with the relationship between oppressed people’s awareness of oppression and the steps they take to combat the structures that oppress them. Second it exposes the problematic understandings of the term “activism”. For Collins (1986), “Black women’s reality cannot be understood without attention to the interlocking structures of oppression that limit Black women’s experiences suggest that possibilities that for activism exist even within such multiple structures of domination” (1986, p. S23). Third, a focus on the culture of Black women is useful because it helps develop a model that explores the relationship between oppression, awareness and activism. In other words, it is necessary to develop models that emphasize the relationship between interlocking oppression, the choices Black women make and the actions they take. Ultimately, valuing Black women’s culture is important in providing a rich, contextual understanding of the live of Black women.

Review of the Literature:

Black students have made tremendous strides in education. For example, data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) indicated that the percentage of Black students (between the ages 25-29) who had graduated from high school went from 87 to 93 percent. Additionally, the report found that the number of Blacks (also between the ages 25-29) who attained at least a bachelor's degree rose from 13 to 22 percent. According to information found within the most recent report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the number of Black students that attend college has increased. Viewed as being more accessible than HBCUs (Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton & Wilson, 1999), the number of students attending PWIs has increased significantly over the years with approximately 85% of Black students attending PWIs (Hoston, Graves, & Fleming-Randle, 2010). The literature on this topic points to a variety of reasons that could explain why more Black students attend PWIs instead of HBCUs. First, it comes down to numbers and the fact that there are more PWIs than HBCUs (Brooks, 2015). Second, PWIs tend to be better funded than HBCUs "due to systemic, racial patterns of discriminatory practices in state funding" (Brooks & Starks, 2015, p. 7). These "discriminatory practices" (Brooks & Starks, 2015, p. 7) have resulted in HBCUs being more expensive than PWIs. Additionally, PWIs, as a result of their economic resources, tend to have better facilities, more widely renowned faculty members and better scholarships (Brooks & Starks, 2015, p. 7). Third, the education received from PWIs is usually perceived as better (Brooks & Starks, 2015, p. 7). However, despite the high number of students enrolled at PWIs, the numbers related to graduation rates tell a different story. Published in 2012, the U.S. Department of Education reported that 39.7 percent of Black students that attend public universities graduate compared to 60.2 percent of White students. While these numbers indicate

progress especially when it comes to the number of students that graduate from high school, they show that there is still work to be done in terms of Black students that attend and graduate from institutions of higher education.

Considering this, the section that follows discusses the literature closely associated with the experiences of Black students, in general and Black female students, in particular that attend PWIs. In particular, this section focuses on key factors, including but not limited to, institutional climate and support and their impact on the persistence and experiences of Black students. In order to properly situate this literature, this section begins with an historical overview of the experiences of Black students at institutions of higher education. Next, this chapter focuses specifically on Black female students at the university level. Additionally, an overview of literature related to Black students at PWIs is provided. And lastly, an exploration of the literature related specifically to Black female students is explored.

Black Students and Higher Education: A Historical Overview

Regarded, as one of the most diverse education systems in the world, the American education system, despite its diversity, has been marked by a historical legacy of exclusion, especially when it comes to students of color. According to Herndon and Hirt (2004), Black students have “historically been underrepresented in American higher education and continue to be so today” (p. 489). The exclusion of Black students from colleges and universities can be traced back to the legal prohibition of teaching Black students in the South to read or write or attend school, which lasted until 1865. This period of prohibition was followed by periods of “de jure” and “de facto” segregation in schools. In order to overcome this, historically Black colleges and universities were founded. Created with the express intent of educating Black students, HBCUs were founded beginning in the years following the Civil War until 1964. For the Black

community, HBCUs, with a few exceptions, offered the only opportunities for attainment of degrees of higher education.

Beginning in the 1960s, due to a strong response to the Civil Rights Movement, Blacks saw their access to predominantly White institutions of higher education increase (Yenika-Agbaw & Hidalgo-de Jesus, 2011). Seen as a possible solution to the racial inequalities that plagued the country prior to this period, increased access to higher education for Black students led to an increase, almost 85 % (Hoston, Graves, & Fleming-Randle, 2010) in enrollment numbers at PWIs (Allen & Jewel, 2002; Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrando, 2001; Green, 2001; Moore, 2001). As a result, predominantly White institutions found themselves dealing with the presence of a student population that was unfamiliar and for many, integration was not easy. Throughout the country there were incidents of rioting, violence and even deaths as Black students began to enroll in and attend classes at various institutions (Eagles, 2009).

While the racial climate at PWIs has improved since the 1960s, there is still work that needs to be done. According to Hurtado et al. (1998), “the historical vestiges of segregation have left an impact on an institution’s ability to improve its racial/ethnic enrollments, and such underrepresentation of specific groups contributes to stereotypical attitudes among individuals” (p. 6). In other words, the campus environment is informed by the historical legacy of the institution which has been defined by the exclusion of particular groups which can impact its current campus environment and practices (Hurtado, 1992). As a result, the increase in enrollment that took place during earlier years has begun to decline. For example, the lack of support for programs that ensure equality has contributed to fewer Black students choosing to attend PWIs (Conyers, 2013, Hawkins, 2013). According to Allen, this “period of boundless expansion and optimism has moved into one of retrenchment and financial constraints, which is

reflected in a dilution of higher education's commitment to Blacks and other minorities" (as cited in Levinson, Cookson, & Sadovnik, 2014, p. 361).

Black Female Students and Higher Education: A Historical Overview

The Civil War ushered in a new era for Blacks in terms of educational opportunities. Prior to the Civil War, Blacks were largely excluded from attending institutions of higher education. As previously mentioned, it was during this time that the first HBCUs were founded. While they offered Blacks the opportunity to attend college, HBCUs were not the first institutions of higher education to admit Black students, particularly Black women. The beginning for Black women in higher education can be traced back to Oberlin College, the first university to admit Black students and the first to confer degrees on Black women before the Civil War. Among those Black women was Lucy Session who received a literary degree in 1850. Twelve years later, Mary Jane Patterson became the first Black woman to receive a B.A. degree in the United States.

During the late 19th century, universities in the northern part of the country saw an increase in the number of Black female students that attended their institutions (Evans, 2007). As more and more women began to enroll, the number of Black women attending universities began to overshadow those of Black men (Evans, 2007). Prior to this, Black men represented the majority of Black students attending college. However, these numbers began to decline as a result of a number of factors including but not limited to their higher rates of incarceration, their need to find a job immediately upon graduating from high school in order to support their families, and difficulties adjusting to the campus environment (Roach, 2001; Cuyjet, 2006). Additionally, Cuyjet (1997) found that other factors related to the diminishing presence of Black men in college are related to their higher dropout rate and the violence and poor health they

suffered from as a result of their socioeconomic status. However, despite the decrease in number of Black men attending college, Black women, over the years, have represented approximately 64 percent of the student population for non-White students enrolled in college. Of equal importance is the fact that Black women account for almost 70 percent of degrees earned by Black students (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). While Black men found themselves less likely to attend college due to the situations previously listed, Black women had many reasons to attend college. Traditionally, Black women enrolled in colleges and universities as a way to attain degrees which they could subsequently use in order to educate the children and other members of their respective communities (Perkins, 1983; Hine, 1994; Benjamin, 1997; Evans, 2007) and was viewed as being an example of the “race’s intelligence, morality and ingenuity” (Perkins, 1983, p. 19). While their reasons for attending college has changed over the years are largely historical, Black women continue to pursue degrees of higher education despite the obstacles they face on a daily basis.

Black Students at PWIs: A Review of the Literature

Although research focusing on the experiences of Black students at the university level has not been considered a priority, there is a presence of studies within higher education that have attempted to shed light on the challenges faced by Black students at colleges and universities across the country. In terms of PWIs, researchers have learned a great deal about the factors that impact Black students and their success at the university level. A few of the factors include, but are not limited to, institutional culture and campus environment, social relationships, both on and off campus, and issues related to identity development. Again, while this is not an exhaustive list, it provides a good starting point for exploring literature related to the experiences of Black students at PWIs.

Institutional Culture and Campus Environment:

According to research that has been done in this field, institutional culture and campus environment are important factors when it comes to minority students, in general, and Black students, in particular. For example, Rankin and Reason (2005) found that the racial make-up of a campus has an important role in outcomes like academic achievement and social involvement. Other studies have explored the alienation and lack of engagement with the campus environment and its impact on students (Flowers, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While others have contributed the difficulties faced by Black students to a conflict between the culture of Black students and the social and university culture. Each of the factors will be discussed in greater detail in this section of the chapter.

Racial Climate:

Despite the fact that the number of Black students attending PWIs has increased, numbers related to continued enrollment and graduation rate do not reflect this increase. One factor that contributes to this discrepancy is the racial climate at PWIs. According to the research conducted in this area, minority students enrolled at PWIs often experience social isolation, discrimination and racism which affect, both directly and indirectly, retention and graduation rates (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, & Alvarez, 2007; Museus, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008).

One of the most highly cited studies and a seminal text related to social climate is Hurtado's (1992) text, *The Racial Climate: Contexts of Conflict*. Considered to be a foundational study for this particular area of study, Hurtado's study found that the cause of racial tension on campuses is a combination of various elements. According to Hurtado (1992):

...no single element of the environment may work to produce racial tension on college campuses. It is a configuration of external influences

(historical and contemporary), structural characteristics of institutions and group relations, and institutionalized ideologies. (p. 564)

Considering this, the role of the institution on perceptions of racial climate becomes more and more pronounced.

More recent evidence of this can be found in Museus, Nichols, & Lambert's (2008) study on the relationship between on-campus racial climates and whether or not students finish school. According to the researchers, the negative reactions of minority students to the campus racial climate have a negative impact on minority students' level of involvement, both academically and socially, as well as their degree of commitment to the university. For these researchers, these negative reactions have a direct influence on student success and ultimately on whether students obtain a degree. While this study focused on minority students as a whole, it found that Black students, along with Latino students, were the least satisfied with the campus racial climate.

Published the same year as the previous study, Locks, Hurtado, Bowman & Oseguera's (2008) study adds to previously conducted work on marginalized students and their perception of the racial climate on campus (see also Harper & Hurtado, 2007). By focusing on students' experiences prior to attending college, the researchers found that for students of color, there is a relationship between the amount of time a student spends socializing on campus and the racial tension present on campus. In other words, less time socializing on campus resulted in increased feelings of anxiety which contributed to negative perceptions of racial climate. Additionally, the study found that this anxiety was a result of having very little, if any, interactions with diverse groups before arriving on the college campus. In order to lessen the anxiety of minority students and improve their perception of the campus social environment, the researchers suggest that universities dedicate themselves to the development of curricula and activities that encourage dialogue across diverse groups of students.

Brown, Morning and Watkins (2005), in a more recent study, explored how Black engineering students perceived the campus climate and its effect on persistence. While this study explored the experiences of Black students at HBCUs in addition to those that attend PWIs, it showed that students were more likely to continue their enrollment at a PWI as a result of fewer experiences with racism and discrimination. In other words, students will continue at PWIs if they have a more favorable understanding of the on-campus racial climate. Additionally, this study found that students at HBCUs report not only higher grades but also more positive views of the campus environment (see also Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002).

Microaggressions:

Defined by Chester Pierce as being “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of blacks by offenders” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-González & Willis, 1978, p. 65), the theory of microaggressions have been applied to the experiences of Black college students. For example, Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso (2000) in a study of 34 Black students at a PWI found that students expressed feelings of racial tension inside and outside the classroom. For example, in the classroom, Black students reported feelings of isolation and invisibility, negative relationships with faculty members, self-doubt, helplessness, and being stereotyped. Outside the classroom, students expressed feelings of racial tension, uncomfortable environment, the presence of double standards and feelings of being unimportant. As a result of these microaggressions, the researchers found that Black students:

...strive to maintain good academic standing while negotiating the conflicts arising from disparaging perceptions of them and their group of origin, additionally, they must navigate through a myriad of pejorative racial stereotypes that fuel the creation and perpetuation of racial microaggressions. (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000, p. 69)

Additional studies also pointed to the presence of microaggressions in the classroom in terms of activities and curricula (Reynolds, Sneva & Beehler, 2010; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera, 2009). According to these studies, microaggressions in the classroom create a hostile learning environment (Solorzano, Ceja & Rosso, 2000) that leads to stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and lower productivity among impacted students (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Ultimately, the research on microaggressions at the university level has shown that due to their invisibility, microaggressions can lead to feelings of disillusionment and feelings of confusion (Sue & Constantine, 2007) due to the fact that they produce “psychological dilemmas that unless adequately resolved can lead to increased levels of racial anger, mistrust, and loss of self-esteem for persons of color” (Sue & Constantine, 2007, p. 275).

Social Connectedness and On-Campus Support:

In the foreword to Strayhorn’s *College Students’ Sense of Belonging* (2012), Hurtado states that “sense of belonging is one of those factors that is intertwined in good institutional practice and program development but is not often the source of evaluation” (p. x). In other words, more attention needs to be paid to the sense of belonging students at the university level feel with the institutions they attend. Connected to a person’s sense of belonging, social connectedness determines a person’s involvement in their environment (Costen, Waller & Wozencraft, 2013; Gardner, Pickett, & Knowles, 2005; Hoffman, et. al., 2002; Waller, Costen, & Wozencraft, 2011). Social connectedness and a feeling of belonging are important factors in the retention of minority students. In other words, the more connected a student feels to their institution, the more committed a student feels to their institution the greater their commitment (Hoffman, et. al., 2002). Additional studies have found that the greater their commitment the more likely they are to remain enrolled and ultimately graduate (Gardner et. al, 2005).

Studies have found that students are more likely to succeed when they have a connection with and are supported by the university they attend. This connectedness to the campus environment or culture promotes a sense of belonging or ownership. Traditionally, a sense of belonging or connectedness when attending PWIs impacts persistence among Black students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jones, 2001). For example, Pike & Kuh (2006) suggest that the connectedness Black students feel with the university is dependent on a few factors. First, the background of individual students is important when considering how they will “fit” in on a college campus. For example, Yan (1999) found that factors including student ethnicity, socioeconomic status and family structure contribute to how the socialization process students undergo. Additional studies have found that a students’ social capital impacts their performance and connectedness to the campus environment. According to Yosso (2005), a students’ “peers and other social contacts can provide instrumental and emotional support” (p. 79) that can help students access the campus environment as well as other institutions within society. Additionally, in a study of the retention rate of Black students in a recreation and leisure studies program, Waller et al. (2011) found that the following areas were important determining factors in whether students continued at the university: 1) connectedness to the academic program they were enrolled in, 2) connectedness to the campus, and 3) relationships with faculty members. Through the use of focus groups, the researchers concluded that the participants involved in the study did not feel socially connected to the academic program of choice or the campus. Additionally, the researchers found that the students felt that they did not belong due to the lack of supportive relationships with faculty members. However, in a study published two years later, Costen, et al. (2013) had different results when studying the lived experiences of Black students enrolled in a hospitality program at a PWI. Overall, they

found that the determining factors associated with the previous study were the same but students' attitudes about their connectedness with the program were different. For example, in this particular study the researchers found that while the students felt more of a connectedness to the program, they still did not feel connected to the campus environment as a whole. However, despite this lack of engagement with the campus environment, Black students were retained in the program, at a rate comparable to their White counterparts, due to the relationships they formed with their classmates and the presence of supportive relationships with minority faculty members.

Related to social connectedness with the campus environment is the level of on-campus support students receive as students. Numerous studies have explored the role that support has on the experiences of minority students. For example, Rogers and Molina (2006) found that the social support minority students received from their peers, faculty and other on-campus groups is an important deciding factor in whether students remain at the university. Similarly, Hoffman et al. (2002) found that students that established relationships with individuals who could provide them with academic support, are "more resilient and comfortable in the university environment" (p. 237). Additionally, they found that the feeling of being "cared for" (Hoffman et al., 2002, p. 237), was an important deciding factor in determining whether or not students stayed on at the university. Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali and Pohlert (2003-2004), found that social support, along with self-esteem, impact students' ability to adjust to the social environment on campus. According to this study, students with high levels of self-esteem were also more involved in on-campus activities; they also reported that the support students received on campus was a good indicator of how students adapt to the social and academic environment on campus. Karemera, Reuben, and Sillah (2003), in a study of 223 Black students at a HBCU, found that students

perform better if they have access to better academic services such as well-equipped classrooms, technology services and internships. According to the researchers, these types of services offer students access to educational opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom, which ultimately enriches their learning experience. While this study focuses on the experiences of students at HBCUs, it provides evidence of the importance of on-campus resources and could possibly explain why some Black students choose better funded PWIs in place of HBCUs. Similarly, in a quantitative study conducted in 2006-2007, Nicpon, Huser, Blanks, Sollenberger, Befort, and Robinson-Kurpius, studied how perceived levels of support impact the academic performance and ultimately persistence of Black students at a PWI. According to the study, Black women were among those that reported having strong support networks on campus which provides more evidence of the fact that the presence of a social support network can be instrumental in Black students' success and overall feeling of satisfaction with the campus environment.

Student Culture v. Campus Culture:

Campus culture is one of the most important forces at work within institutions of higher education (Museus & Harris, 2010). Historically, however, most of the past research on campus culture has focused on understanding the difficulties faced by minority students when it comes to a sense of belonging within the dominant campus culture present at PWIs (see Feagin, Hernan & Imani, 1996; Hurtado & Carter 1997; Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996). In recent years, researchers have moved beyond understanding the obstacles minority students face when it comes to gaining membership in the dominant cultures of PWIs and have instead turned their attention to using cultural frameworks to understand the experiences of minority students (see González, 2003; Guiffrida, 2006; Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus, 2007). For example, Kuh and

Love (2000) promote a culture-based theory of retention. For them, the greater the distance between the students' culture and that of the institution's dominant culture, the more likely students are to withdraw prior to graduation. Additionally, they found that students who experience a great deal of distance between the two culture have two options: 1) they can either adjust or adapt to the dominant culture of the campus or 2) immerse themselves in one or more subcultures within the campus in order to gain access to the larger campus environment which is instrumental to their success. In a subsequent study, Museus and Quaye (2009) revisited Kuh and Love's (2000) culture-based theory of retention. In a study of 30 Black students, Museus and Quaye (2009) rework Kuh and Love's (2000) theory and replace it with an intercultural perspective influenced by the cultural realities of the students studied. According to Museus and Quaye (2009), the issues that result from the incompatibility between students' cultural knowledge and the new cultural information they are exposed to as students at a PWI, are inversely related to their success in school.

Additional studies have demonstrated the importance of building relationships between students' academic and social lives and their cultural background (González, 2003; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kiang, 2009; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008). According to Museus and Jayakumar (2012), "when postsecondary institutions engage the cultural backgrounds and identities of students in an academic or social sphere of college life, they create environments characterized by greater insensitivity than when those cultural backgrounds and identities are not engaged" (p. 108).

Social Relationships:

Studies have found that the socialization process students undergo upon entering a university is important in determining student success. The process through which students understand, adapt to and acquire the skills needed to navigate the college environment has been explored in various

studies (see Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Phinney & Haas, 2003; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris & Cardeza, 2003). According to these studies, various factors impact how students respond to external and internal forces on campus. For example, it is important to consider students' background when they enter the university. Additionally, the relationships they cultivate with faculty and other members of the campus community are important (Chang, 2005; Kuh and Hu, 2001; Museus & Harris, 2010). Finally, involvement in student organizations determines student outcome in the classroom and outside the classroom.

Family:

Students' background prior to enrolling in college is an important factor when considering retention and success. In fact, some research maintains that consistency between students' experiences and beliefs after they enroll is important (González, 2003; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kiang, 2009; Museus, 2008). One of the most common themes studied in relation to this is the influence of students' families and home communities. However, there are two contradictory sets of opinions about the role families play in their lives. The first opinion maintains that students' families provide them with personal, social and cultural support that positively influences their success at the university level (Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Maramba, 2008; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Waterman, 2012). The second maintains that while family support can be an important source of cultural and emotional support, minority students sometimes find it difficult to feel fully supported by their family, especially if they are the first in their family to attend college (Bonner, Marbley, Howard-Hamilton, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2003). For example, Herndon and Hirt (2004) argue that the level of support Black students receive from their family is an important factor in determining their experiences. Additional

studies have also concluded that familiar support is a strong indicator of academic success for Black students at the college level (Cole, 2011; Fischer, 2007; Littleton, 2002).

Relationships with Faculty:

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), in their text *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research, Volume 2*, reviewed research literature that demonstrates the importance of student-faculty interaction. According to their review of the literature, students' relationships with faculty was essential to retention. Faculty-student interaction represents one of the most salient factors in determining students' success (Booker, 2007; Fischer, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008). For example, Booker (2007) found that students preferred relational learning styles that place an emphasis on personal instruction. Additionally, the students involved in the study expressed a more favorable opinion of faculty members who provided a safe and comfortable environment. Ultimately, Booker (2007) concluded that Black students feel valued and accepted within the classroom as a result of these interactions (see also Tinto, 2006). Interaction with faculty members positively impacts students in other ways. For example, in a study that included both Black and non-Black students, Kuh and Hu (2001) examined the relationship between students and faculty and its effect on students' educational and personal progress. Of all the students included in the study, Black students reported having more interaction with faculty members than other students. Consequently, the researchers found that these students, as a result of their relationships with faculty members, had better study habits and were better prepared for class.

Although research indicates relationships with faculty are important to the overall success of Black students, studies indicate that Black students are often times unable to form positive relationships with White faculty members at PWIs (Moore & Toliver, 2010). One reason that Black students fail to connect with White faculty members is because they feel that White

faculty members are culturally insensitive. According to the research, examples of the cultural insensitivity include: stereotypical remarks about Blacks, treating students' opinions as representative of all Blacks, and failing to include the perspectives of Black students into their course materials (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Guiffrida, 2005). Considering this, it has been found that Black students, when in need, tend to seek academic assistance from family members, friends, or minority on-campus personnel like academic counselors. A second reason that Black students fail to form relationships with White faculty at PWIs is due to the fact that Black students do not view White faculty members as role models. Research on successful Black role models in higher education have found that strong relationships between Black students and role models can increase the self-efficacy of the students (Brittain, Sy & Stokes, 2009).

Student Involvement:

A few studies have focused on the relationship between academic success and persistence with students' involvement with on-campus organizations, particularly Black student organizations. Tinto (1993), in a useful but out-of-date study, argued that it is important for Black students to become socially involved in the campus culture in order to do well. According to Tinto, Black students' integration into the campus environment is facilitated by more formal associations than their White counterparts. Additionally, Museus (2008) found that minority students who participated in minority student organizations found it easier to navigate the dominant campus environment through the production of ethnic spaces. Additionally, Museus (2008) found that minority students who participated in minority student organizations were able to maintain a certain level of their ethnic identities on the campuses they attend.

In a qualitative study exploring the social and cultural benefits Black student organizations offer Black students, Guiffrida (2003) detailed how these organizations facilitate

the integration of their participants into the social environment at PWIs. First, Black students that participated in Black student organizations believed that their involvement in these organizations provided them with opportunities to establish relationships with other Blacks, both inside and outside the university. For these students, these relationships were important because they provided them with support that they traditionally, according to research, cannot receive at PWIs (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Second, involvement with Black student organizations offered Black students an opportunity to help other Black students by advocating for university-wide changes across campus and community service projects. Third, the study found that Black student organizations offered Black students a reprieve from the White dominant culture. In other words, Black student organizations offered Black students spaces where they could socialize in ways that were familiar and comfortable. Ultimately Guiffrida concluded that these benefits were important in the integration of Black students from predominantly Black communities.

While some research has documented the benefits of participating in Black students organizations for Black students, other research has questioned whether involvement in these groups is beneficial for Black students (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). For example, Fries-Britt & Turner (2002) maintain that high-achieving Black students decline participation in non-academic activities in order to pursue academic endeavors. Additionally, Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) concluded that involvement in Black student organizations hindered the social integration of Black students at PWIs by isolating them from the larger campus environment.

In another study, Guiffrida (2004), in a comparison of high-achieving and low-achieving Black students at a PWI, found that while most of them reported involvement in Black student organizations, there were significant differences in their participation. For example, Guiffrida

found that low-achieving students described themselves as being too involved with Black student organizations while high-achieving students described themselves as being actively involved. Additionally, the study explored the leadership styles of the two groups of students and found that low-achieving, overly involved students identified with more hierarchical leadership styles (Allen, Stelzner & Wielkiewicz, 1998) whereas, high-achieving, actively involved students expressed leadership styles that were more flexible. Ultimately, Guiffrida (2004) concluded that students' leadership style possibly contributed to whether participation in Black student organizations were a liability or an asset to the overall academic success of Black students attending PWIs.

Fraternities and Sororities:

At the beginning of the 20th century, Black students that attended various institutions of higher education found themselves excluded from participating in the fraternal organizations on campus because of their race. In order to combat this, Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) were founded. Today, there are 9 Greek-letter organizations (also known as the Divine Nine) operating throughout universities all over the United States. The first of these organizations, Alpha Phi Alpha, Fraternity, Inc., was founded on the campus of Cornell University in 1906. At the urging of one of the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha, Ethel Hedgeman Lyle, founded the first Black sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Sorority, Inc. in 1908 at Howard University. Since the creation of these organizations, seven other BGLOs were founded between the years 1911-1963. The founders of the first eight BGLOs were scholars and activists a little more than one generation removed from slavery. Preoccupied with finding ways to respond to Black students' feelings of discrimination and isolation, the first 8 BGLOs placed an emphasis on community building and social justice (Dickinson, 2012; Parks, 2008). Historically, these organizations were

created in order to combat societal racism in general and the campus racism, particularly at PWIs, that the students faced on a daily basis.

According to research on the topic (Dickinson, 2012; Parks, 2008), fraternities and sororities are examples of on-campus organizations that can impact students' success, both academically and personally. According to Parks (2008), membership in BGLOs are extremely important: "the membership experience contributes positively to social, cultural, and academic adjustment" (p. 422). This is true especially for Black students who attend PWIs and evidence of this can be found in the following studies. McClure (2006) explored the relationship between membership in BGLOs and success. The site of the study was a large, PWI in the southeast with a well-documented history of racism. Participants, 20 Black males, in the study expressed a sense of closeness to one another which was beneficial in combating possible alienation on campus. Additionally, the participants believed that membership in their fraternity increased their success and improved their overall experiences at the university. Similarly, Severtis & Christie-Mizell (2007), using data from the General Social Survey (GSS), found that membership in BGLOs positively influenced graduation rates by 370 percent. The study, through the use of surveys from 3,712 respondents also found that Black students benefit more from Greek organization affiliation than their white counterparts. Based on these studies, it becomes clear how important BGLOs are to the experiences of Black students that attend PWIs.

Black Female Students at PWIs: A Review of the Literature

To date, few studies have been conducted that provide an in-depth exploration of Black female students at predominantly White institutions. Traditionally, studies related to Black students that attend PWIs treat their experiences as universal and pay little, if any, attention to the differences between Black male and female undergraduates. In other words, most of the

studies discussed in the previous section, neither identify nor address adequately the role gender plays in the experiences of Black students that attend PWIs. Interestingly enough, an examination of the sample populations of various studies, reveal higher numbers of female participants compared to men; however, these differences are not discussed. While these studies have provided useful information as demonstrated in the previous section, they fail to offer an appropriate space for adequately exploring the complex, multi-faceted lives Black women lead as students at PWIs. As a result, Black womens' experiences are considered to be by-products and they are essentially marginalized as a result of researchers seeking to explore a universal Black student. Considering this, choosing to study only Black women is appropriate since they have needs and experiences different than Black men. While there are some commonalities between Black male and female undergraduates that attend PWIs, is it not always a good idea to study them as a universal group (Cokley, 2001). The review of literature that follows provides an overview of recent literature that either focuses solely on the experiences of Black female students or studies that include both male and female populations but clearly distinguish between the two groups.

Campus Climate:

As previously mentioned, racial climate is an important factor in determining students' sense of belonging. Unfortunately, the racial climates of PWIs are still described as being hostile and unfriendly (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The hostility minority students, particularly Black female students, encounter is not new. For example, in *Black Women in Academe-Issues and Strategies* (1989), a seminal text on Black women and institutions of higher education, Moses explores the campus climate for Black women at the university level. In a study that included students, faculty member and administrators, Moses

found that “Black women students on predominantly White campuses are rarely integrated into the life and culture of their institutions, nor are there clear paths for them to effect change” (p. 4). For Moses, Black women at PWIs are treated differently and this treatment separates them even more from their out of classroom experiences due to stereotyping, sexual harassment, isolation and lack of support. In a related but more recent quantitative study, Rankin and Reason (2005) analyzed student perceptions of campus climate. Using data broken down by gender, the researchers reported that 68% of their participants were females. Of this 68%, a little more than 8% were Black female students. Although nearly half of the Black students reported that they had observed harassment, only 32% of the respondents stated that they had personally experienced it. Ultimately, Rankin and Reason (2005) found that Black women observe and experience harassment at higher rates than other students at PWIs.

In addition to harassment, the campus climate of PWIs impacts Black female students in other ways. For example, Winkle-Wagner (2009), conducted a qualitative study of 30 Black female students at a PWI in the Midwest. Through the use of individual interviews and focus groups, the researchers explored participants’ feelings of alienation, isolation and subsequent shock that resulted from their marginalized status on campus. Additionally, the participants discussed their struggles with identity. This struggle was due to the fact that they had little choices in terms of identity, particularly, when it came to race, due to the racial and social construction of the campus environment. In another qualitative study, Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quianoo, & Williams (2007) found that the unwelcoming campus climate threatened the academic aspirations of Black graduate students working on their doctorate. Additionally, this study found that the campus environment also determined whether or not they sought assistance from faculty members. The seven participants chosen for the study expressed feelings of

“invisibility” which was the result of their marginalization both on-campus and off-campus. The participants also reported negative interactions with white faculty members.

Institutional Support:

Related to the campus climate, is the level of institutional support students receive. Research focused exclusively on Black women and institutional support is limited. However, there are some studies that have explored the issue. For example, Wolf-Wendel (2000), explored the high retention and matriculation rates related to Black, Hispanic and white women enrolled at five institutions. Interested in figuring out what helped the women studied successful, Wolf-Wendel (2000) conducted interviews with administrators, faculty members and students in order to determine how the institution supports the women. Wolf-Wendel (2000) found that the universities involved in the study were so successful because of their emphasis on establishing positive relationships between students and faculty members. Additionally, Wolf-Wendel (2000) found that offering women spaces where women feel nurtured and supported was also instrumental in the success of the women. Another important factor in determining the success of the women studied was the leadership opportunities offered to them. Finally, a commitment to allowing students opportunities to connect with members of their communities was found to also be important in the women’s success (see also Landry, 2002).

Mentoring as part of institutional support has also been explored. In Winkle-Wagner’s (2009) study that was discussed in the previous section, the creation of “sister circles” offered participants a way to interact with one another as well as support one another. As a peer mentoring or support group “sister circles” were instrumental in helping Black female students deal with the problems they suffered as students at PWIs. In group sessions led by a professional counselor, the participants in the group sessions discussed a wide range of topics including but

not limited to, their personal backgrounds, an assessment of themselves, and their personal relationships with others. Overall, the study found that the creation of support networks and peer mentoring groups are important for Black women at PWIs (see also Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Rosales & Person, 2003).

Coping Strategies:

A few studies concerned with Black women at PWIs have focused on their transition to college. According to this research, Black females at PWIs suffer from a diminished racial identity. As a result, they expressed negative feelings in terms of self-esteem and body image (Roberts, Cash, Feingold, & Johnson, 2006). Additionally, it has been reported that Black female students at PWIs experience racism differently than previous generations. In other words, young Black women are more vulnerable to racism as a result of less experience with extreme acts of racism (Coomes & Debard, 2004).

In order to combat the stress associated with racism and discrimination, some studies have identified various coping methods used by Black female students. For example, Shorter-Gooden (2004) described the coping strategies Black women use to deal with the racism and sexism they often times experienced on campus. While the study did not set out to explore the experiences of students only, most of the participants had attended college at some point during their lives. Using data collected from a previous study, the researchers classified the responses of the women that participated and found that the internal and external resources identified “seem to function as the women’s everyday buffer against oppression, whereas the specific coping strategies are more situation specific, more like a set of tools that are available and drawn on as needed” (p. 416). The internal resources described by Shorter-Gooden (2004) were based on the values of the participants and had an important role in determining how they respond to

incidents. The following were important internal resources identified by the participants: relying on their faith and valuing oneself. For the Black women involved in the study, their faith or relationship with God is a primary coping strategy used to combat issues like racism and sexism. This assertion was consistent with research on Black female college students that explored how their faith helped them navigate experiences on campus (see Patton & McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2002). In addition to their faith, Shorter-Gooden (2004) also determined that the way Black women see themselves is important in helping them resist the negative, stereotypical representations of Black womanhood.

Although the previously discussed study by Shorter-Gooden (2004) found a positive relationship between the coping strategies Black women employ and their overall well-being, other research shows the negative consequences associated with coping strategies. For example, Watt (2006), in another study focused specifically on Black female students, examined the coping mechanisms used by Black female students. In this quantitative study of 111 Black female students who attended two HBCUs in the Southeast, Watt (2006) found that the coping mechanisms used by the women to navigate the campus environment negatively impacted their self-esteem. According to Watt (2006), Black women face difficulties when it comes to their college experiences due to the fact that they are members of two marginalized groups and as a result, they often times suffer from negative self-esteem. An additional study by Johnson-Bailey (2001), explores the experiences of eight Black women who have reentered into higher education. According to Johnson-Bailey (2001), the women involved in the study cope with racism, sexism and classism by using silence, resistance or negotiation strategies:

...Black and women have been conditioned to not ask questions as a way surviving. Many of the women spoke of silence as a familiar strategy from their familiar backgrounds....Silence as a coping mechanism occurred as an internal and external strategy. There were times when a respondent would not

think of or face an issue because it was too painful. In such an example, the silence was internal. In other examples the women would refuse to answer questions or participate in activities because they equated silence as safer course of action. (p. 112)

According to Johnson-Bailey (2001), these methods of coping can have negative consequences. For example, the process of negotiating or deciding when to respond and when to be silent, occurs both inside and the outside of the classroom and leads to unhealthy habits. Ultimately, Johnson-Bailey (2001) found that the institutional barriers present accompanied with feelings of being out place resulted in the women being unable to complete their degrees because of the fears and doubts related to their ability to perform academically.

Summary:

This chapter provided an overview of the theoretical framework used for this study. Through the use of Black Feminist Thought, this chapter explored the intellectual traditions that influenced Black Feminist Thought. Additionally, this chapter discussed key concepts related to Black Feminist Thought that are important for creating a critical space for an “oppositional Black aesthetic” that promotes different ways of knowing, thinking and being while paying attention to how signifiers of difference intersect and impact the ways that Black female students are represented and how they represent themselves.

Finally, the current chapter explored the experiences of Black students, both males and females, at PWIs. Through an exploration of the history of Black students’ presence at PWIs, the current study detailed the struggles Black students endured in order to enter PWIs. Additionally, it reviewed recent literature related to the experiences of Black men and women in order to detail the experiences Black students continue to deal with today as students at PWIs. In addition to providing a historical overview of Black students’ presence at PWIs and looking at their current situation, the chapter also highlighted the need for in-depth qualitative studies that focus solely

on the experiences of Black women at PWIs. Many of the studies discussed in the section related to studies on Black women were quantitative and while they provided useful information in terms of coping strategies, etc. they fail to truly capture the lived experiences of Black women that attend PWIs.

The next chapter discusses the methodology that was used for this project. Focusing on the relationship between representation and photography, the next chapter discusses the various phases of a traditional photovoice project while also highlighting the various concepts that have informed the photovoice process as well a rationale for using photovoice. Additionally, the next chapter discusses how the traditional photovoice method was modified in order to meet the specific needs of the current project. After a discussion about the modified photovoice approach used for this project, the chapter that follows then turns its attention to outlining the actual research design used for this project. This section begins with an overview of my role in the project and then continues with a brief overview of the campus setting. Next, the chapter provide a profile of each participant. Lastly, the next chapter discusses how the data collected for this project was analyzed.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

In order to create a space for an “oppositional Black aesthetic” for Black female students attending a PWI, the present study used a photovoice approach. The current chapter, after an exploration of the role of photography in research, provides a more detailed overview of the photovoice method. Additionally, this chapter describes the modified photovoice method that was used for this research project.

Photography and Research:

As previously mentioned in the first chapter, the use of photography as a research tool has been used for many years. Historically, photographs have primarily been used in the areas of visual anthropology (Banks & Murphy, 1997; Hockings, 1995) and visual sociology (Harper, 1994). Using photography for purposes other than illustration began in the early 1900s with Bateson and Mead’s field study project *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (1942). The first of its kind, this field study project provides evidence of how photographs can be used to not only illustrate daily life and experiences but also to describe and interpret them. This trend has influenced work in the field of visual anthropology as well. For example, Harper’s (1987) study *Skill and Community in Small Shop* demonstrates how photographs can be used to not only make observations but also engage participants in discussions about their experiences using the photographs. Additionally, Garfinkl (1967) laid the groundwork for using visual research in additional areas. For example, Collier and Collier (1986) examined how photography can be used in ethnographic fieldwork in place of more traditional methods like field notes. Beecher’s

work was also instrumental in exposing the relationship between photography and social research (Riley & Manias, 2003).

Despite its prevalence in anthropology (Cheatwood, 1978), photography has not been used a great deal in social research (Riley & Manias, 2003). Literature on the uses of photography and research show that it has been used in a variety of ways. According to Schell, Ferguson, Hamoline, Shea & Thomas-Maclean (2009), “images can be used in research: as documentation; in analysis; as a catalyst to create knowledge and develop understanding; to track data; and as data themselves” (p. 341) (also see Glover-Graf, 2000; Killion, 2001; Riley & Manias, 2004; Samuels, 2004). While the use of images depends on the focus or purpose of the research project, Grady (2001) argues that it is possible to use any image as part of the sociological research. For Schell, et al. (2009), “images have complex histories, including who produced them, who the intended audience is, and what they were used for” (p. 341). Considering this, any type of photographs can be used for research due to their potential to generate ideas and raise questions (Schell, et al., 2009).

According to literature on the uses of photography and research, the value of photographs comes from their ability to create and support meaning-making (Schell, et al., 2009). For Schell et. al. (2009) “photographs are used to help focus responses to particular ideas, connect the world of the researcher and act as a means to help enhance memory” (p. 342) which is instrumental in gaining a better understanding of the lives of marginalized groups (see Farrough, 2006; Goopy & Lloyd, 2005; Riley & Manias, 2004; Samuels, 2004).

Overview of the Photovoice Method:

First introduced by Wang and Burris (1994) as photo novella, photovoice has become a useful methodological tool that empowers participants to reflect on their daily lives and experiences. Developed in order to allow participants the chance to be the subjects of their own research instead of objects of another person's research (Purcell, 2009), "photovoice enables people to identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang, 1999, p. 185). While photovoice can be used as a primary methodological tool to conduct qualitative research, the present study does not employ it in this way. Instead, the present study uses techniques associated with the photovoice method in order to create opportunities for creating an "oppositional Black aesthetic". While

Theoretical Underpinnings of Photovoice:

The concept for photovoice was developed using three different but overlapping theoretical frameworks: Freire's concept of education for critical consciousness, feminist theory and documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1997). The first, Freire's concept of education for critical consciousness focuses on helping students recognize the role they have in the production and transformation of culture (Lewis, 2011). For Freire, images are useful because they facilitate the production of new knowledge by helping students see themselves as active participants in the world they live in. In order to do this, Freire promotes the use of images in helping people think critically about their own experiences (Lewis, 2011). The second theoretical framework is feminist theory which focuses on empowering vulnerable populations, specifically women. Feminist theory, in order to expose the male bias present in more traditional participatory models (Wang & Burris, 1997) recognizes and appreciates women's' roles as researchers, advocates and participants (Wang et al., 1996). In addition to recognizing the fact that women are experts into their own lives,

feminist theory acknowledges that women's experiences have the potential to act as a catalyst for social change (Wang et al., 1996). Additionally, feminist theory promotes the idea that women must initiate and implement changes instead of others implementing changes on their behalf (Wang et al., 1996). The final theoretical framework, documentary photography, has been used a great deal to visually document and explore the lives of certain groups. Described as "the social conscience presented in visual imagery" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 371), documentary photography has been used to describe a wide range of visual styles and genres dedicated to social change. Different than document photography, photovoice gives cameras to individuals who otherwise do not have access to tools that can be used to facilitate change. By placing cameras in the hands of oppressed groups, photovoice allows them to make the decisions about how and what they share with others which offers researchers the opportunity to uncover descriptive information regarding marginalized groups (Catalani & Minker, 2009).

Key Concepts in Photovoice:

As previously mentioned, photovoice offers marginalized groups the opportunity to document their lives and experiences Wang (1999, p. 187) has identified the following concepts that apply to the photovoice technique:

Concept #1: Images teach

Concept #2: Pictures can influence policy

Concept #3: Community people ought to participate in creating and defining the images that shape healthful public policy

Concept #4: The process requires that planners bring to the table from the outset policy-makers and other influential people to serve as an audience for community people's perspectives.

Concept #5: Photovoice emphasizes individual and community action

While these concepts are important for any project using photovoice, a more detailed discussion of all of them is not necessary here because this project used a modified photovoice method that did not take all of these concepts into consideration. The concepts that are relevant to the modified approach are discussed later.

Rational for Using Photovoice:

As a research method that allows for more nuanced understandings of the lives and experiences of marginalized groups, photovoice was selected for this research project for a variety of reasons and the following section provides the rationale for why it will be used to explore the experiences of the participants selected for the project.

Ease of Implementation:

According to Wang and Burris (1997), almost anyone can be taught to use a camera. Considering this, photovoice as part of a research project can easily be implemented. By giving cameras to people who wish to visually represent their experiences and share them with others, photovoice offers members of marginalized communities the chance to communicate with members of the dominant society without having to read or write in the dominant language (Wang & Burris, 1997). Therefore, photovoice can be a useful and powerful tool for vulnerable and stigmatized populations.

Ability to Transfer Power:

By allowing participants to take photographs of their daily lives, photovoice transfers power from researchers to participants by allowing them to choose what pictures to take. Through acknowledging that participants are experts into their own lives, power is transferred from those in dominant society to marginalized groups. For this particular study, photovoice is used to help

Black female students at PWIs create a space for an “oppositional Black aesthetic”—a critical space that allows them to share their knowledge and experiences while allowing them to push back against negative, stereotypical representations of Black womanhood. Empower Participants:

In addition to shifting power, photovoice has the potential to empower participants. A review of previous studies using photovoice indicates that participants, as a result of active participation, feel empowered (see Delgado, 2015; Lopez, 2006; Stack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Teti, Pichon, Kabel, & Binson, 2013). For the participants, this empowerment came as a result of the realization that they had opinions and experiences that were not only important to them but also to others. Using cameras as a research tool promotes a sense of pride and ownership among participants (Wang & Burris, 1997). Additionally, using cameras to document their lives and experiences encourages participants to claim authority as experts in their own lives (Rhodes, et al., 2008). By allowing participants to take photos which can be used to tell stories from their perspective, photovoice offers an opportunity for marginalized groups to advocate for their own well-being (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Promote Consciousness:

Using photovoice empowers members of marginalized groups to identify and subsequently explore issues that are important to them. In addition to empowering participants, photovoice promotes consciousness about the issues selected for the particular project. In other words, taking pictures and critically discussing them leads to the creation of knowledge and public awareness (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Deacon, 2004; Wang & Burris, 1994). For example, Carlson, Engebreston and Chamberlain (2006), in a photovoice project involving low-income, Black community members reported increased critical consciousness as a result of providing participants with opportunities to reflect and think critically as part of the photovoice process. For Freire (1970)

promoting critical consciousness is important because it could result in participants making well-informed decisions that lead to change.

Summary of Rationale:

While there are other reasons to use photovoice as part of the research methodology, the reasons discussed here are of utmost importance for this particular project. The purpose of this project was to do more than simply take photographs and discuss them. The aim of this project was to create a critical space where Black female students who attend PWIs can represent themselves and their experiences using photography and storytelling—a space useful for transferring power from the dominant campus culture to the participants as well as empowering them to initiate and implement change as well as raise consciousness for the issues that matter the most to them.

Steps of the Photovoice Process:

There are several steps involved in using photovoice as part of the research process (Wang & Burris, 1997). Wang (1999), in her text *Photovoice: A Participatory Action Research Strategy Applied to Women's Health*, outlines the photovoice method and identifies the following steps of the photovoice method:

1. Select and recruit a target audience of policymakers or community leaders;
2. Recruit a group of photovoice participants;
3. Obtain informed consent;
4. Pose an initial theme for taking pictures;
5. Distribute cameras to participants and review how to use them;
6. Provide time for participants to take pictures;
7. Meet to discuss photographs; and

8. Plan with participants a format to share photos and stories with policymakers or community leaders.

While most projects follow the above mentioned steps in a step-by-step fashion, it is important to mention that photovoice is not a linear process. Instead, it “evolves through cycles of reflection, evaluation, and action” (Duffy, 2011, p. 156). In other words, every photovoice project is different and how a group moves through the steps identified by Wang will be influenced by various differences like time, budget, resources and goals and objectives.

Research Design:

Now that an overview of the photovoice method has taken place, the rest of the chapter focuses on how photovoice was used for this particular research project. As previously mentioned, a modified photovoice method was used for this project and the particulars are discussed in the section that follows. However, before a discussion about the research design for this project can take place, it is necessary to discuss my role as researcher, participant and facilitator.

My Role as Researcher, Facilitator and Participant:

Traditionally, discussions about the role and relationships between researchers and participants are often explored in terms of outsider/insider dynamics. In other words, the focus is on positioning the researcher and participants as two groups that represent opposite ends of the spectrum with the researcher representing the outsider who is interested in gaining access to or learning about the participant or insider. While this approach may be useful for some researchers, it cannot be applied to this particular project for two important reasons. First, my personal background and experiences influence the multiple roles I take on as researcher, facilitator and participant. Second, as an example of a participatory action research strategy, photovoice focuses

on shared experiences and the co-production of knowledge as a result of collaborations among participants but also with the researcher (Green & Kloos, 2009; Schell et. al., 2009).

Instead of attempting to place myself on one end of the insider/outside spectrum, I chose to embrace the multiple identities that simultaneously make me an insider and an outsider. According to Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009), attempting to situate oneself as anything else is problematic and too simplistic. For Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009), “holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within the group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not complete difference” (p. 60). Considering this, it becomes obvious that researchers can only occupy the space between. Similarly, Humphrey (2007) maintains that researchers run the risk of losing their sense of self if they are forced to choose a role. For Humphrey, it is necessary to ‘activate the hyphen between insider-outsider’ in order to move easily between different worlds and multiple roles.

In order to ‘activate the hyphen between the insider-outsider’, I had to think carefully about my personal background and my research goals. As a Black woman who attended a private, predominantly White institution as an undergraduate, I have first-hand knowledge of the space that Black women at PWIs occupy. This first-hand knowledge is ultimately what influenced my interest in exploring the lives and experiences of Black female students that currently attend PWIs. While my membership in this group situates me as an insider, my overall research goals move me further away from this position and place me within an outsider status due to my familiarity with the topic academically as well as my age and experiences. In other words, extensive research into the topic positions me as an expert, at least when compared with the participants. And despite the fact that I also attended a PWI as an undergraduate, it has been

almost 10 years since I graduated which places me even further away from the participants who currently attend a PWI.

By ‘activating the hyphen between insider-outsider’, I have a better understanding of my multiple roles in terms of this project. First and foremost, I was the primary researcher for this project. As the researcher, I was interested in exploring the lives and experiences of Black female students by means of interviews, one-on-one discussions and the collection of the artifacts and documents that serve to shed light on the group being studied. Second, and closely related to my role as researcher, I served as facilitator for this project. As facilitator for this project, there were three important tasks that I must consider. First, it was important that I understand the photovoice process in order to explain it to the participants during our initial meeting. Second, as facilitator for this project it was important that I encouraged the participants to share their ideas as well as critically explore the issues that are important to them. Third, it was important that the facilitator provided participants with a non-judgmental listener committed to empowering the participants. My final role for this project was that of participant. While I did not participate in the actual taking of pictures, I worked with the student participants in organizing their photographs as well as helped them prepare personal narratives based on their experiences and the photographs selected. Therefore, my classification as a participant for this project was due to the collaborative work that the student participants and I did as part of the photovoice project.

Rationale:

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study was to explore how Black female students at a PWI create a space for Black aesthetics using photography and personal narratives.

In order to do this, this project will use a modified photovoice approach. As a research tool, photovoice was selected for this project for the following reasons because it: 1) reflects the complexity of the data collected, 2) promotes new levels of engagement and 3) provides multiple ways of exploring experiences.

Research Setting:

The location of this study is a flagship university in the South that is classified as a public research institution. Offering degrees undergraduate, graduate, and professional studies, the university has an overall student population of 37,000 students. The breakdown of the undergraduate population by ethnicity is detailed in the table below:

Table 1: Undergraduate Population at the University of the South

	Degree-Seeking First-Time First Year	Degree-Seeking Undergraduates (include first-time first-year)	Total Undergraduates (both degree- and non-degree-seeking)
Nonresident aliens	93	799	1,175
Hispanic	289	1,039	1,058
Black or African American, non-Hispanic	575	3,339	3,404
White, non-Hispanic	5,519	23,358	23,768
American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	21	112	113
Asian, non-Hispanic	65	317	327
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	4	28	28
Two or more races, non-Hispanic	248	780	796
Race and/or ethnicity unknown	10	79	83
TOTAL	6,824	29,851	30,752

According to the data presented above, Black students, both male and female, represent a little more than 11% of the total undergraduate population. Of this 11%, 2,210 of these students identify as Black female students between the ages 19-23 (OIRA, Oct. 2, 2015).

As previously mentioned, the setting of the present study was a large, research institution in the South. Like many universities across the country, the names of many of the buildings on campus can be traced back to key figures related to the history of the university. For example,

during a couple of our sessions together, a few of the women involved in this project discussed various buildings on campus named to commemorate the contributions of known racists. While these buildings will not be discussed in great detail in this section, it is important to mention here when discussing the setting of the study. Considering the fact that including the names of these buildings would risk exposing the site of this study, the present study has omitted the building names and when necessary altered the narratives of the participants related to these buildings. While I was initially concerned that doing this would take away from the narratives of the participants, I ultimately realized that this was a necessary step in order to satisfy the IRB requirements set forth by the university.

Participants:

Due to the involved nature of the project and the need for in-depth discussion, seven women were selected to participate in the study. In order to participate, participants had to have met the following criteria:

- 1) be a black female, degree-seeking undergraduate,
- 2) be between the ages of 19-23
- 3) have completed at least one semester of undergraduate coursework.

Description of Sample:

The sample for this research project included 7 Black female undergraduate students at a predominantly white institution. All of the women were traditional-aged undergraduate students (18-23 years old) from various academic programs across campus. Participants were recruited using a variety of methods such as recommendations from faculty and staff, student organizations and word of mouth. While the study initially began with 11 women, four of the young ladies that originally agreed to participate in the study stopped responding

to requests for meetings and for that reason they will not be included in the study. *Table 2* provides a summary of the demographics of the young women involved in this project.

Table 2: Participant Demographics

Participants	Classification	Degree Program(s)
Leona	Senior	Major(s): Religious Studies and African-American Studies/Minor(s): N/A
Brandy	Junior	Major(s): Accounting/Minor(s): Spanish
Kayla	Junior	Major(s): Political Science and Pre-Law/Minor(s): Liberal Arts Undergraduate Initiative
Alyssa	Junior	Major(s): Biology/Minor(s): N/A
Nichole	Senior	Major(s): Criminal Justice and Pre-Law/Minor(s): Communication Studies
Neo	Freshman	Major(s): Journalism/Minor(s): International Studies
Miya	Senior*	Major(s): History and German/Minor(s): N/A

* by credits

Participant Profiles:

As previously mentioned, a Black Feminist Thought perspective was used to analyze the data for this project in order to explore the collective and individual experiences of the Black women that participated in the study. In order to better understand their experiences, it is important to briefly profile each participant in order to help better contextualize their experiences. Please note that the profiles that follow are being used as brief introductions for each participant. Each profile explores their reasons for attending US as well as a brief overview of experiences that have had a lasting impact on each of them—experiences that have helped shape their understanding of who they are as Black women at the University of the South.

Participant 1: Leona

Leona, a twenty-two year old senior, was the first participant to contact me about participating in the study. Originally from Houston, the University of the South was not Leona’s first choice. Coming from Texas, Leona stated during her preliminary interview that she originally applied to liberal arts schools because she did not want to attend a large institution. However, after realizing how expensive smaller, liberal arts schools are, Leona decided to apply

to the University of the South. Upon applying, Leona was offered a National Achievement Scholarship which was the main reason she decided to attend the University of the South. In addition to the substantial scholarship, Leona was also influenced to attend US because of the Honors College and the beautiful campus.

Majoring in Religious Studies and African American Studies, Leona was involved in many extra-curricular activities during her four years as an undergraduate at the University of the South. Some of the extra-curricular activities that she participated in included: Honors College Assembly, SGA⁹ Black Student Leadership Council and the University Fellows Experience. Despite being heavily involved in on-campus activities, Leona mentioned, on several occasions, the struggles she faced as an incoming student:

I think it might have been the second week that I was here, that I was filling out the common app trying to transfer. I couldn't put my finger on why I didn't like being here but I just knew that, I just felt that, I didn't belong and it was so strong that I was literally filling out the application.

Convinced to stay at the encouragement of a friend, Leona's frustration with being a Black female student at a PWI continued. This dissatisfaction led to her participation in various social justice movements on campus. For example, her work with integrating the Pan-Hellenic sororities on campus is well documented not only by local newspapers but also in national publications. For Leona, her participation in this movement served as a catalyst for the other work that she has done at the University of the South and the work that she will continue to do now that she was graduated. Additionally, Leona worked with the We Are Done movement on campus whose purpose was to bring attention to the racism and discrimination prominent on

⁹ SGA is the abbreviation for Student Government Association.

UA's campus. Her hard work, along with that of other students and various faculty members on campus, resulted in the creation of the Intercultural Diversity Center on campus.

In addition to participating in the sorority integration and other social justice movements, Leona was also active in civic and community service projects. One of the projects she was involved in was entitled "Deconstructing the Myth of Absence". The purpose of this project was to help Black students at a middle school in a nearby city that is plagued by poverty explore their Black identity. In the excerpt that follows, Leona discusses the original project and how it was used to develop an Honors College course that she taught alongside her colleague, now boyfriend:

...this service project we have created called "Deconstructing the Myth of Absence". We created it initially as a course that was focused on how to teach Black students about Black identity through giving them a critical lens through which to look at American history. We did that for two years at [a] Middle School.... and then we created it as an Honors College course.... We had 8 students I think and so it shows me, or I guess I took a picture of it because it's I have been doing a lot of work in this curriculum specifically but also more broadly in work I've been doing in inclusion, diversity, identity formation, cultural competency. All of these things are things that I am really passionate about and I think that this picture really embodied that. The students that we originally taught told us that it really changed their lives. One student was really touched by this documentary that we showed called *Slave by Another Name*, he actually showed it to his parents. And he was pledging in a fraternity, an IFC¹⁰ fraternity and not only did he take what we taught in class to his community but he also brought some of the issues of that community to the table and how he overheard racial slurs or insensitive material from some of his pledge brothers and he was able to kind of like vent that out and we were able to talk about it as a class. It really provided an opportunity for those students to learn from each other, especially about practical experiences on campus and I think it's important to create those type of groups on campus.

¹⁰ IFC is the abbreviation for the North-American Interfraternity Conference.

For Leona, her participation in these movements here because they played such a huge role in shaping who she is: "...it's been a lot of work but it's definitely improved my life I suppose in the way that I'm able to actualize my voice and really figure out what I stand for."

Participant 2: Brandy

Brandy, a junior majoring in Accounting and minoring in Spanish, was a junior at the time of her involvement in the project. Originally, Brandy considered attending other universities. Due to the fact that her parents refused to pay for college, Brandy made her decision to attend US based on the scholarship package offered. Additionally, the number 8 ranking of US's Accounting program was important in her decision. A self-described student leader on campus, Brandy was motivated to do well in school and participate in on-campus activities to empower other women on campus as well as overcome stereotypes. In fact, these are the same factors that inspired her to participate in the research project:

I'm really passionate about helping others and empowering women so that's kind of why I wanted to do your study....To show, I guess African-American women that you don't have to be a statistic...even when you're in college and you're struggling, you can excel.

An example of her commitment to empowering others can be seen when she talks about one of the pictures she included of herself:

I really just like to work out, that's what my initiative is about for to get the campus moving.when I was campaigning I also met another girl and this is kind of depicted in my next picture but she wants to stop the intimidation of women when they're lifting. People don't think women should lift weights....



Figure 1: Brandy at the Gym

Additionally, during her preliminary interview, Brandy expressed concerns about the lack of diversity on campus; specifically, she voiced frustration over the fact that “discussions” about diversity on campus dealt primarily with Black students and how other minority groups were left completely out of the equation.

These frustrations led her to join various organizations across campus including SGA, the National Association for Black Accountants, the Future Black Law Students Association and Brandy was not only an active member in these organizations but also held leadership positions in each of them. While she held leadership positions in various on-campus organizations, Brandy was most proud of her work in SGA. As one of the few Black students on SGA, Brandy shared why she was encouraged to run for Senate despite the obstacles in place:

....I’m not political, I just like wanted to help my constituents out because I felt like SGA wasn’t doing anything. My mom was like ‘Okay, I don’t think you have time for that. You’re taking 20 hours. Maybe not.’

.... I approached [...] an organization that helped independents run. And I went to one of their interest meetings and I said, 'hey, I think I want to run'They asked 'what are you going to run for?' And when I said the college of business...They told me that that's the hardest college to win, and you do know that that's the most machine ran college. I didn't know that at the time and I left the meeting kind of discouraged. I was like maybe I shouldn't run and I called my mom and I was like 'I might not run. They just told me there's literally less than 1% chance that I'm actually going to win this....' There hasn't been an independent female in over a decade. We don't know, as far as back as history can tell us right now if there ever has been an African American female to win.... I want to do this just to show people that even if I don't win, I had the courage to go ahead and do it.... That day I kind of like woke up and I was like "Alright, I am going to run" and I picked a campaign managerobviously there were obstacles like people asking 'who is this kid? 'There's no way she's going to win. I picked a campaign manager and she was busy at the time so I had to do all my stuff myself and it was just overwhelming. But I really enjoyed it. The process, I think it made me stronger as a person. Even sometimes when your friends weren't behind you, you to kind of like stand by yourself. Going into sorority houses, talking to them helped me out because I probably have a friend in every single house. But just being able to go through that process and coming out on election day with 328 votes which was the second highest only to [], which I mean, we knew he was shooting for 1,000 votes.to be second with probably the fourth most highest votes in history, when someone doubted me from the very beginning and said that you're never going to win, that, that's definitely...(exhales)...I know, this is, I know it's a moment that you have to look back and thank God that He gave it to you.

For Brandy, having the opportunity to serve as a Senator in SGA has provided her with opportunities to help others. While she has spent considerable amounts of time working on bills to improve student life for all students at US, she has also worked hard to help diversify not only SGA but the entire campus as a whole. Being a student leader is an important part of who she is and the legacy that she would like to leave when she graduates. In particular, Brandy has made it clear that she is motivated to do well in school and her extra-curricular activities so that she can set a good example for others.

Participant 3: Kayla

Kayla was a junior at the university when I first met her. Majoring in Political Science and Pre-law and minoring in liberal arts, Kayla like the other participants involved in the study, never originally considered attending the University of the South. After attending a small, liberal arts high school in Georgia, Kayla knew that she wanted to attend a larger public university, preferably out-of-state. Considering this, she began researching primarily SEC schools because of their proximity to home and the weather of the region. Additionally, she looked at schools she had some type of connection with and in her preliminary interview discussed how attending US was an accident:

...I kind of just stumbled upon the University of the South. It wasn't necessarily somewhere that was in my sights because I don't have family in [the state]. I don't have any ties or connections...so it was never something that I thought of or a place I would go"

Even though she never intended to attend US, the liberal arts minor was an important selling point in her decision. For Kayla, this program would give her the small, liberal arts feel that she was accustomed to while also allowing her to attend a larger university.

At the time of our preliminary interview, Kayla was gearing up for the SGA election season. Already involved in SGA, Kayla was looking to become more involved by running for one of the top SGA cabinet seats. In addition to her work with the SGA, Kayla was also heavily involved with her sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. In fact, she currently serves as the President of her chapter. And when Kayla was not participating in activities with SGA and her sorority, she spent a lot of her free time volunteering on and off campus.

Despite her heavy involvement in on-campus activities and her growing popularity, Kayla discussed the challenges she faced on a daily basis as a Black female student at a PWI. For example, one of the experiences that Kayla says defined her experiences as a Black female

student at US occurred during her freshman year. While I will not discuss the incident in detail here because it will be detailed in a later section, the incident left a lasting impression on Kayla:

...just being at frat row, it just really caught me off guard and I didn't know what to do...I got back to my room and I cried, and I cried and I was really so close to feeling like I want to go home because this isn't how you're supposed to treat people.

This incident served as not only a wake-up call for Kayla who considered herself to be in a "very post racial mindset" but also motivation for her to do well and get involved on campus to try and change the campus environment.

Participant 4: Alyssa

Alyssa, another junior at the time of the research project, considered attending other universities but always knew that she would attend the University of the South because her mom attended US. An Alabama native, Alyssa attended a public residential high school in Mobile, Alabama. Originally an Engineering major, Alyssa switched to a major in Biology with hopes of going into forensics after graduation.

Like many of the other women involved in this project, Alyssa was involved in various on-campus organizations. In particular, the Greek organizations Theta Tau and Rho Lambda. Alyssa was also active with the United Greek Council (UGC)¹¹ and served as its President her sophomore year. Her experiences as President of UGC and her involvement in Theta Tau have heavily influenced Alyssa's time at the University of the South:

...being on UGC was a challenge academically and socially. It was a challenge academically because I am in charge of this council which is very important, not only to the university but to the student body and I had to keep my grades up so I can on that council. But also

¹¹ Here's a description of UGC taken directly from the university's website: "commonly referred to as UGC, is the governing body for the six multicultural and special interest based sororities and fraternities at the University of the South. Established on the US campus in spring 2009, UGC exists to enable member organizations to share ideas and resources, promote mutual respect and equality, and provide a support network for students on campus".

socially it was a shocker because I started interacting with more people I would have never been affiliated with, more white people I would have never been affiliated with.

Though Alyssa characterizes her participation with UGC as challenging both academically and socially, her involvement with the council along with the work she has done with Theta Tau are sources of tremendous pride with her. For her, one of her defining accomplishments was when she was elected president of the United Greek Council which saw her “governing about seven predominantly white groups”. When discussing a photo of her from an awards ceremony, Alyssa said the following:

The award I'm holding was my personal award. It says, "Most Outstanding Executive Board Member of the Year." It's got my name on it and it's pretty great. I got that from being the UGC President. I got honored for other things I've done because I was the second UGC President. It was a big leap because the first UGC President was of course a white man. The move to me was a transition I believe for people that had to work with me. They see my name, with my name being Alyssa [...], they assume that they are going to meet a different type of person. I'm definitely not what they figured would walk through the door. There is essentially no difference between me and the person they assumed was going to walk through the door. There is no reason that they can't work with me. If they can find a reason, it's their own. Of course, walking into, I didn't want to be UGC President at first because I was like, ‘This is going to be a job where I'm going to have to actively break down some walls. I'm not sure I want all of that.’ My little brother, who is in the picture, he just looked at me and he was like, ‘Why not?’ I was like, ‘Well, if you're going to challenge me, okay.’ I put in a lot of hours into UGC. It was basically like having another major. I put in a lot of hours too. I was honored for it. You had asked me a question about excellence outside of academic, and I feel like this is a prime example of it. Being over a predominantly white counsel here [] and then being honored for it. These awards in the front...six awards that my fraternity won personally from the Greek System. I of course take credit for it because there are a lot of things I told them, "If I'm going to lead, I need y'all to help." They did. We definitely got rewarded for it. We closed shop.



Figure 2: Alyssa at Awards Ceremony

In addition to her participation in these organizations, there have been a few other experiences that have shaped Alyssa's life as a student at US. For example, Alyssa discussed how taking an African-American studies course at the university impacted her identity development:

I took an African-American studies class, it was African-American Studies 101, and that changed the way I view myself because...by this time I had joined Theta Tau and I was so deep into that and so concerned with fitting in with the rest of US. I was a little afraid to step out...I'm different and that's okay. And it should be respected, it should be acknowledged.

While Alyssa admitted that embracing her Black identity was not widely accepted among her new fraternity brothers, she said that it was good for her because for the first time since becoming a student at US she was able to be who she was "unapologetically."

Participant 5: Nichole

A Criminal Justice and Pre-law major with a minor in Communication Studies, Nichole was a senior at the University of the South during her involvement in the project. Prior to enrolling at US, Nichole considered attending other universities but said that she chose the University of the South because of its reputation as "one of the best colleges overall." Additionally, Nichole attributes US's diversity as a deciding factor in her decision to attend. For Nichole, the fact that "not everyone is of the same race and walk of life" has shaped her

experiences at US in a positive way. For example, during her preliminary interview Nichole discussed the impact that being a leader on the freshman orientation team had on her:

...my sophomore year I served as an [] orientation leader and just being able to wear my polo that had my scripted A and oversee approximately 7,000-8,000 incoming freshman made me feel like that was my whole demeanor as a student. Being able to be a leader and also serve as an ambassador and be the first glance of the university, to show the diversity of the university....

In addition to serving as an freshman orientation leader, Nichole spent her time outside the classroom at the Women's Resource Center as a youth mentor, as assistant team leader with the Center for Service and Leadership, and as Secretary and Treasurer for Alpha Phi Sigma, the Criminal Justice Honor Society.

Different than the other women that participated in the study, Nichole stated that she did not have firsthand negative experiences to share:

There have been things that I notice happen or things I've overheard or things I've just seen but overall I've never really felt like I was affected by anything that I have done....

For Nichole, race or gender was never a factor in opportunities she may have missed out on. Instead, Nichole argued that "it just really depends on who you know." Overall, Nichole expressed that she was grateful for the experiences and opportunities she had as a student at US and that everything she has done, including her participation in this project, was in an effort to be a good example to others and to "represent the university in the most positive light as possible."

Participant 6: Neo

The youngest of the women involved in the project, Neo, a freshman, was born and raised in Atlanta. After considering other universities, Neo decided to attend the University of the South because of its journalism program. Upon completing her degree at US in a few years Neo hope to

work for ESPN or E! News. Unlike the other participants in the study, Neo was not involved in any on-campus activities due to her busy course and work schedule.

Although has expressed an interest in getting more involved, she stated that her lack of familiarity with campus issues has prevented her from becoming involved in the recent protests that took place:

There was protest stuff going on earlier this semester...they were talking about wanting changes from the school...I walk passed and I guess some people thought I would join but I said... 'no, that's not my fight. I don't want to get involved in that without knowing the background story....'

Considering this, Neo stated that she has spent much of her first year at US blending in because of the history of the university:

...I tend to stick to what I know and blend in with the crowd so that way I know to watch my footing because we're in the state of [...] and all of the history that I know about, I prefer to not be seen.

During the preliminary interview Neo also discussed how Black women on campus are “definitely less equal than man, regardless of race...” All of the events mentioned here have fueled Neo’s desire to get involved in social and non-social endeavors at the university.

Participant 7: Miya

A German major with a minor in International Studies, Miya contacted me about participating in the research project after hearing about it from a friend. As a student in her second year at US, Miya spent the Fall semester studying abroad in Germany and returned at the beginning of the Spring semester to finish the few remaining classes she has left; she plans to graduate in December 20106. Raised in Georgia, Miya had no intentions of attending the University of the South. Originally, Miya considered attending women’s colleges, such as Smith and Agnes Scott. She also considered co-ed institutions like UGA, Georgia Tech, the University of Arizona and UNC. Ultimately Miya was encouraged by her parents to consider US because of

their National Achievement Scholar package and after considering all of the financial aid offers from all of the schools previously mentioned, Miya opted to attend US because they offered the most money.

Like many of the other women in the research study, Miya is involved with many on-campus organizations. In particular, she is heavily involved with the Black Greek community as a member of Sigma Gamma Rho and she also served as the Director of Academic Affairs with the NPHC¹². Additionally, she is involved in the following organizations: German Club and Roosevelt Campus Network.

During our sessions together Miya discussed issues related to race and diversity on campus. Additionally, she spent a lot of time discussing the need for finding spaces on campus that allow students to be themselves. As someone who identifies as “hashtag not straight”, safe spaces on campus are important to her:

...then there are my experiences with SPECTRUM. When I came in I was like ‘oh, my God they actually have a LGBTQ space on campus....’ I went to a meeting and it was pretty cool. And at this point they had an active queer and trans person of color group which was something I hadn’t been expecting in any way shape or form. That you have a queer space at all on this campus, I was like ‘woo hoo’ and then to have one specifically for people of color was something else and going to that and finding comradery....it’s a big thing.

In addition to these types of safe spaces, Miya also talked a lot about the importance of finding quiet spaces on campus for students as well as difficulties finding on-campus support, especially from professors. While she has found that US has not been always the friendliest environment, which is obvious from her discussions about her experiences on frat row, she is grateful for the spaces that she has been able to find in her two years at US.

¹² NPHC is an abbreviation used for the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. which is the governing body of nine of the historically Black fraternities and sororities, also known as the “Divine Nine”. Currently representing over 1.5 million members internationally, the NPHC was officially established on May 10, 1930.

Modified Photovoice Method:

As previously mentioned, this current research project used a modified photovoice approach. While Wang and Burris (1997) identified several steps that should be considered as part of the photovoice process, photovoice is not a linear process and can be modified in order to meet the particular needs of a research project. Initially, Wang's approach to photovoice as previously outlined was intended to be used however, a modified approach is necessary for this project. In the first place, individual interviews were conducted in place of group sessions to discuss and contextualize the photographs taken by participants. The purpose of conducting individual interviews is twofold. First, arranging group sessions can be difficult due to scheduling conflicts. As a result, we run the risk of not being able to meet in a timely manner which could result in students forgetting information about the photographs they have taken. Second, individual interviews allow us the opportunity to discuss all of the photographs taken instead of a select few. According to Castleden et. al (2008), "limiting participants' comments to only their "best" photos (as Wang and others have done)..." could potentially skew the results of the overall project. Additionally, a modified approach was used to focus on the creation of personal narratives in place of the production of short captions which is a traditional step in the "classic" photovoice method. The use of narratives instead of captions were used to help gain a more in-depth understanding of the lives lived by the participants—an understanding that cannot be fully achieved using short captions alone. And finally, a modified photovoice method was used because of limited access to policymakers at the university. The initial steps of the process outlined by Wang include the participation of policymakers and while it is hoped that the data collected during the process will be considered by faculty and administrators as they continue to

explore ways to help Black female students at PWIs succeed, their (policymakers) participation was not a requirement of this project.

Phases of the Modified Photovoice Approach:

The modified photovoice approach used for this project was broken down into four phases. The first phase consisted of gaining IRB approval and recruiting. During the second phase, I conducted preliminary interviews with participants. At the conclusion of the preliminary interview, a photovoice workshop took place. Finally, the participants were asked to take pictures that represent their lives. The third phase, consisted of meeting one-on-one with participants in order to organize their photographs, discuss them and explore their experiences during the second phase of the project. As part of the last phase, participants used their photographs and the discussions from the previous step to prepare personal narratives.

Phase #1: IRB Approval and Recruitment

IRB approval is required for any research projects using human subjects. Considering this, the first step in completing this research project involved receiving IRB approval from the Institutional Review Board at my university. In addition to the online application that was be completed, certain documents (see appendix) were be submitted and reviewed as part of the IRB process.

Once IRB approval was granted, recruitment took place in order to find participants that satisfied the eligibility requirements for the project. In order to participate, the students for this study had to meet the criteria previously discussed in the section labeled participants. In order to find participants that met these requirements, multiple strategies were used. The first recruitment strategy involved using a flyer (Appendix C) that briefly described the research study and its purpose. Additionally, the flyer included the eligibility requirements previously discussed. The

flyers were posted in various locations across campus. Particular attention was paid to high-traffic areas where members of the target audience were able to see the flyers. Another recruitment strategy involved sending information to on-campus organizations that have large numbers of my target audience. For example, contact was made with representatives of on-campus Black sororities and other non-Greek organizations. Another strategy used to identify participants involved recommendations from on-campus personnel, both faculty and staff members. Considering the strategies of recruitment outlined, purposeful and snowball sampling was used for this project.

Of all of the methods used for this project, the last recruitment strategy was the most beneficial. While flyers were hung up around the student center and other on-campus areas and emails sent to on-campus organizations, the majority of the women who participated in this project were based on recommendations from various people on campus. As recommendations were made, flyers and a brief description of the project were sent via email to the women. Although some of the women chose not to participate in the study, they forwarded the details about the project to other women that fit the criteria. Ultimately, 13 women asked to participate in the study; however, not all of them completed the various phases of the project. Of the 13 women that expressed a desire to be in the study, only 7 women completed all of the phases of the project.

Phase #2: Preliminary Interviews and Photovoice Workshop

Once participants were identified and their eligibility verified, preliminary interviews were scheduled with each participant. During these preliminary interviews, background information was collected from each participant. The questions that were asked during this interview can be found in Appendix E. The next part of the interview was to briefly discuss the

purpose of the study and after participants had the chance to ask questions and they were answered, they were given the opportunity to continue to the next phase or decline to participate. Once they indicated their willingness to proceed, informed consent (Appendix D) was obtained from each participant.

After the preliminary interview, participants were asked to participate in a photovoice workshop that will helped familiarize them with the photovoice method. This step, like the preliminary interview, was done on a one-on-one basis. The purpose of the photovoice workshop was to ensure that participants had an understanding of the goals of the study, the photovoice method, procedures, risks and ethics involved. Additionally, participants were trained on how to use the digital camera (purchased prior to the photovoice workshop) they were to take their photographs. A few of the participants opted to use the camera on their smartphones instead of the digital cameras secured for this project. Whether they chose to use the digital camera provided or their own personal smartphone, the participants were given the option of using an SD card to store their photos or email them.

Originally, 11 preliminary interviews were completed and IRB consent was given by each of the participants. However, at some point after the preliminary interview and the photovoice workshop, 4 of the women stopped responding to email requests for follow-up interviews. Since they did not complete all phases of the project, their information was not used and they were not considered as part of the study sample.

Phase #3: Take, Organize, Discuss and Contextualize Photos:

Once participants completed the photovoice workshop, participants were asked to take photographs that they felt best represent their daily lives and experiences. Little guidance was

given as to what they should take pictures of. However, each participant was asked to spend some time taking photographs that could be used to address the following prompts.

1. Take photos that visually represent how you locate yourself in the physical spaces at the university.
2. Take photos that show how you visually (re)present yourself socially and culturally at the university.

While participants had to take photographs they feel represent themselves, the prompts provided above were included to ensure that participants focused on areas of their lives closely related to the purpose of this particular study.

Each participant was asked to take photographs of their choosing. Afterwards, they were asked to return the digital camera and SD card or email the photos they took. Separate folders were created for each participant and were to store their photographs, interview transcriptions, and personal narratives or stories. Once photographs were downloaded, the camera and SD card were cleared so that another participant could use the camera to take their photographs.

After photographs were collected, either via the SC card or email, each participant was asked to schedule a follow-up interview to organize, discuss and contextualize their photos. Before discussing the photos, it was important to allow participants to organize them in a way that made sense to them. After the photographs were organized, the PHOTO acronym (Appendix F) was used to discuss them:

Describe your **P**icture.

What is **H**appening in your photo?

Why did you take a picture **O**f this?

What does this picture **T**ell us about your life?

How can this picture provide **O**pportunities for us to improve life?

In addition to discussing the photos taken, participants were the opportunity to discuss their personal experiences beyond what was photographed. In particular, the participants were asked about how they currently use social media to document their daily lives and how it compares with what they were asked to do in this project.

Phase #4: Personal Narratives or Stories:

During the final phase of the process, students used discussions from the previous phase and their personal experiences to record their personal narratives. While much of their personal history was likely to be shared during the previous phases, this part of the process allowed them to re-share the information in the form of a personal narrative or story. As previously mentioned, multi-modal ways of knowing were important for the purposes of this study. By combining photography with storytelling or the production of narratives, a critical space for creating an “oppositional Black aesthetic” via agentive identities was created.

In order to do this, students were given the option of meeting with the researcher to record their personal narrative using a digital voice recorder or to record their narrative online via skype if need be. Each participant was asked to record their personal narratives at a time and location convenient to them. The personal narratives or stories were downloaded to a computer and stored in the previously created file for each participant. Due to the personal nature of the information contained in the narratives or stories, the digital recordings were stored on a password protected computer used by the researcher and no one else.

Data Analysis:

In any qualitative research project, analyzing and interpreting data collected is essential in organizing information. Additionally, analyzing data is necessary in order to help gain a better understanding of the phenomena being studied. This process of analyzing data requires discipline, a guided approach and a certain amount of creativity (Taylor-Powell & Renner,

2003). Data for this particular study included the following: interviews, photographs, personal narrative or stories, field notes and a diary to be kept by the researcher.

Although the data for this project was collected separately, it was analyzed together. While the point of this project is to create an “oppositional Black aesthetic” that can be used to explore the experiences of Black women who attend a PWI, an underlying goal of this project was to debunk the myth of the presence of a universal Black woman. Considering this, the data collected was analyzed in order to explore the commonalities between Black women as well as their individual experiences. This method of analyzing the data was selected due to the purpose of this project which is to better understand the lives of Black female students that attend a PWI by focusing on the meanings that different experiences hold for them as individuals and as a group. In other words, this method will provide me with an opportunity to focus on the specific experiences that shape each participant individually and then explore what experiences, if any, are common among the women being studied. The analysis of the data included the following steps:

- 1) transcribing all participant interviews and personal narratives or stories,
- 2) taking another look at the photographs taken by participants along with their personal narratives or stories,
- 3) identifying important themes or areas of concern for each participant, and
- 4) comparing common themes or areas of concern among all of the participants’ data.

After all of the interviews and narratives were transcribed, I looked at the participants’ photographs and stories individually and collectively in order to identify salient themes and subthemes, a key component of qualitative research. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003),

“without thematic categories, investigators have nothing to describe, nothing to compare and nothing to explain” (p. 86). In other words, the identification of these themes and subthemes is a necessary task of qualitative research in general and for this project in particular. As part of the process for identifying the themes and subthemes discussed in later, multiple techniques were used. Despite the fact that more than one technique was used, a close reading of the transcripts was the first step for each of these tasks.

The first technique used to identify important themes and subthemes was to look for common words or repetitions. Considered by some to be the “easiest way to identify themes” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 89), identifying common words or repetitions helped identify themes that occurred and reoccurred across the data. While the process of creating themes using common words or phrases can be done in a variety of ways, for the current project I made notes in the margins of the transcripts of words that each participant used the most. After all of the common words or phrases were identified for each participant, they were compared with the other participants’ transcripts and used to generate a list of possible themes.

Initially, at least 12 possible themes were identified. In order to create a more manageable list of themes, a second technique was used. Because the point of this project was to explore the daily lives and experiences of Black female students a PWI using a Black Feminist Thought perspective and other critical theories related to race, gender and other markers of difference, the second technique focused on identifying themes related to these theoretical backgrounds. According to Ryan & Bernard (2003), this technique is useful because it allows researchers to “search for evidence of social conflict, cultural contradictions, informal methods of social control, [and] things that people do in managing impersonal relationships” (p. 93), elements which are essential to the experiences of the Black women involved in this project. While

critiques of this method point out the fact that this technique draws the researchers attention to certain areas instead of looking at the data as a whole, this limitation was precisely why this technique was used for this project.

After identifying themes related to the theoretical backgrounds used to inform this study, I was able to identify 5 main themes that could be used to discuss the experiences of the participants. In addition to the main themes, various sub-themes were identified as well. The themes identified included the following: experiences before college, personal relationships, the campus environment, participants' accomplishments and the challenges they faced. The information identified as pertaining to their experiences before college and their accomplishments while at the University of the South were used to construct the participant profiles in the previous section. The information collected that pertains to their personal relationships, the campus environment and the challenges they face as Black women at PWIs provides the basis of the remainder of the chapter. In the section that follows, the data will be grouped and discussed according to these themes and related sub-themes. It is important to mention that these themes are not independent of one another and in many cases overlap. While every attempt was made initially to categorize the data collected into one of the emergent themes, it became obvious after a while that that would be difficult in some cases. Considering this, some of the data discussed in this section may appear in more than one place. After the data was discussed according to these themes, an analysis using the tenets of Black Feminist Thought was done in each section in order to explore the experiences of the Black women involved in the project.

Reliability and Validity:

As previously mentioned, the 7 women involved in this project participated in individual interviews which discussed the photographs that they chose to take based on the themes or issues they identified as important to their experiences as students at a PWI. The interviews conducted

as part of this research were recorded and member-checks were used to verify the information collected. Additionally, personal narratives were recorded by each participant, transcribed and then verified through member-checks. Any student that declined participation in the research project was quoted and does appear in the final version of the research. All of the research methods used in this project were approved, prior to the beginning of the data collection process, according to the guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board at the my university (see Appendix B)

Summary:

The current chapter detailed the specific details of the research methodology used for this project. Through the use of a modified photovoice approach, the current chapter discussed how photography and recorded personal narratives or stories were used to engage the participants selected for this study in the creation of a space appropriate for an “oppositional Black aesthetic”. Additionally, this chapter detailed how the present study explored their experiences in order to identify experiences common to Black women as well as those based on the individual experiences of the women. Chapter IV provides a summary of the findings of this project based on the methodology discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV FINDINGS

February 3, 1956:

After her first class, as Lucy was whisked out a back door, the eggs came at her. They splattered the car she ducked into. A brick shattered the rear window. Ten or fifteen men charged the car. As Lucy ran inside Graves hall for her next class, an egg hit her back. "Let's kill her, let's kill her," the crowd yelled. Gun barrels flashed. A mob of around a thousand shouted, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, where in the hell did that nigger go?" For three hours she remained locked in Graves hall, praying for the courage to face death. Finally she was bundled by the state highway patrol onto the floor of a car and taken to the armed sanctuary of a black barbershop (as seen in Carrillo, 2012, p. 290).

The setting of this horrific scene was the University of Alabama in 1956. Prior to this, in September 1952, Autherine Lucy and Polly Myers, two Black women, applied for admission to the University of Alabama. While they were initially admitted, their admittance was revoked when university administrators found out that they were not white (Sargent, 2004). With the support of the NAACP, both women filed a lawsuit against the university's dean of admissions, William F. Adams (see *Lucy v. Adams*, 1955), claiming that they had been discriminated against because of their race (Sargent, 2004). After an almost four-year long legal battle, the university's decision was overturned and Autherine Lucy was admitted to the university. However, despite being allowed to attend classes, her transition was not an easy one and after the events described above Autherine Lucy was suspended for her own safety as well as that of "the students and

faculty members” (Matthews, 2014) of the university. Eventually, Autherine Lucy was permanently expelled from the university as a result of the “statements made by Lucy and her counsel before the court” (Sargent, 2004, p. 16). After the near death experience previously described and other incidents, Autherine Lucy made no further attempts to enter the university until 1989 when she and her daughter enrolled in the university after her expulsion was overturned in 1988. The scene described was only one incident of many. For example, two Black students at the University of Georgia faced death threats (Pratt, 2002) and the following year in 1962, over ten thousand National Guardsmen were sent to Mississippi to ensure the safety of the first Black students to enroll at the University of Mississippi. In 1963, almost 10 years after Autherine Lucy’s admittance was overturned, Alabama governor George Wallace attempted to stop two Black students, Vivian Malone and James Hood, from registering for classes at the University of Alabama. While there are many other similar events that could be discussed here, the most important thing to point out is the undeniable message that Black students were not wanted on predominantly White campuses.

While the plight of Black students at PWIs has changed since the encounters described above, Black students continue to face obstacles at predominantly white universities. These obstacles, as discussed in the review of the literature, include, but are not limited to, the campus environment, racial climate, on-campus support and social relationships. However, as previously mentioned, the majority of the studies that have been conducted on the experiences of Black students at PWIs have failed to account for the differences between Black male and female students. In other words, most of the present literature lumps the experiences of these students into one and fails to provide spaces for an in-depth exploration of the daily lives of Black female students. Considering this, the aim of this study was to explore the experiences of Black female

students at the University of the South (US). The women involved in this study discussed their experiences at the University of the South. Additionally, they discussed their personal backgrounds including why they decided to attend the University of the South. Finally, and more importantly, the women in the study discussed their experiences at the university—experiences that focused on their perceptions of the campus climate and its impact on various areas of their collegiate life.

History of the University:

The University of the South has a sordid and racist history similar to other institutions in the South and for the women in the study it is unmistakable in physical spaces around campus as well as the internal or political structure of the university. Marked by incidents of racism and discrimination, the University of the South was founded during the mid-19th century as a male only university until it eventually admitted women towards the latter part of the 19th century. Like other universities in the South during the time, the University of the South resisted desegregation for years. In fact, the resistance to integrate the university was so strong that the governor of the state physically attempted to prevent Black students from enrolling at the university after a federal district judge ordered that Black students be allowed to enroll. Since this incident, minority students have continued to enroll at the University of the South. In the years since they were first granted admission, Black students have continuously been enrolled as students at the University of the South. Currently, Black students represent less than 12% of undergraduate students at the University of the South.

An awareness of the social and political institutions that make up today's are important to understanding their impact on marginalized groups. Often times, the focus is on understanding how these institutions function in today's society but this section demonstrates the importance of

understanding their historical context too. In other words, in order to understand the experiences of Black women at the University of the South it is important to not only discuss the present-day university but also to explore the historical institutional barriers that still influence their experiences.

During our discussions at least 3 of the participants discussed the names of various buildings on campus and how they have produced a range of emotions from curiosity to anger to anxiety. For example, Neo playfully contemplated the origins of the student center during the session to record her narrative. During her session to record her narrative, Neo mentioned that she was curious as to who the building was named for and what their relationship to the university. While Neo was unaware of the history of this particular building, a few of the participants expressed stronger feelings and concerns when discussing the names of certain buildings on campus.

As we discussed her photos, Leona pointed out a picture of her desk. On her desk there were, among other things, two books. On the cover of one of the books was the man that the building that houses the Honors College is named after. As she continued to discuss the photo, Leona shared that she, along with other students in the Honors College, have been working with one of her professors to address the names of various buildings on campus, including the Honors College building. When discussing the project, Leona shared that her professor:

...got me and a few other Honors College students together to talk about or to do a research project on the history of US and the history of [one of its building namesakes] with the purpose of suggesting different ways that the Honors College could go about addressing the history of the name of the building...

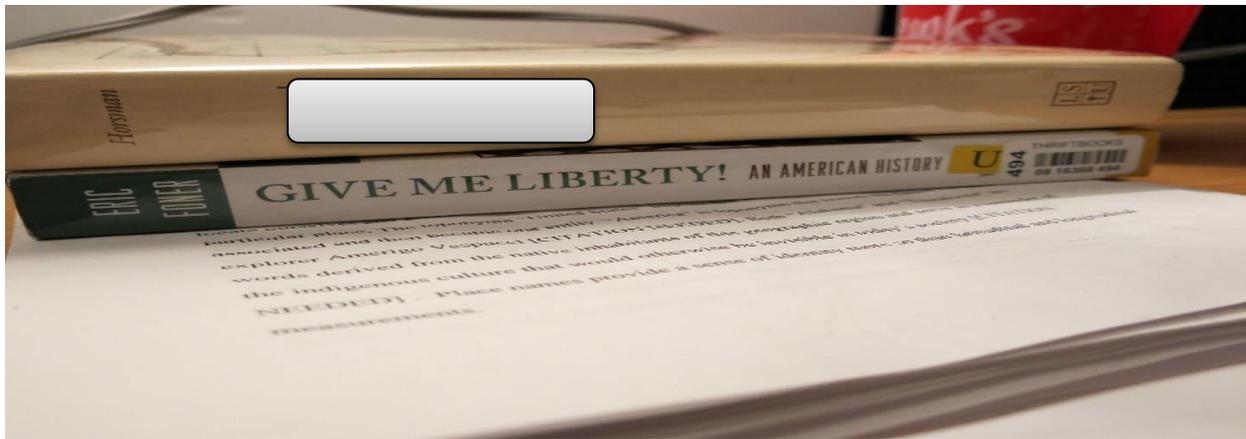


Figure 3: Leona's Books

As we continued to discuss her photos, we came across of a photo of the back of the building itself. Leona said that she decided to take a picture of this because it shows the path that she takes on a daily basis to go to and from her dorm room. According to Leona, she used the back entrance because of her frustration with the building name:

...it shows that I don't want to see the name [of the building] for real. It wasn't until I learned the history of [its namesake] that I was so frustrated with with the name of the building and I think that now I go through the back so I don't have to have to see the name itself.



Figure 4: Back of Honors College Building

While Kayla also discussed the problematic history associated with this particular building, her discussion about the names of building focused specifically on the English building on campus. Kayla took several pictures of this particular building. One of the photos she took was of the plaque outside of the building that details the legacy of its namesake, who was a Senator from the South as well as known member of the Ku Klux Klan. Like Leona, Kayla described how she has to walk past this building and plaque on a daily basis in order to go to class.

In addition to the building names on campus and their relationship with US's problematic past, a few of the women also discussed the slave graves housed at the university. While discussing the photos she took, Kayla shared pictures of the slave graves that are next to the Biology building on campus. According to Kayla, she walked past these graves unaware of their existence for two years:

I took these because they are tucked away and I know my first two years I walked past these and had no idea they were there. I probably assumed they were Confederate soldiers or something... There was a lot of fighting to have these memorials here, however they're so out of the way... That's one of the things that should be presented to students, especially Black students...

As she discussed the photo of the plaque that marks the slave graves, Kayla shared the following:

The next photo is the actual plaque that spells out who the memorial is for and how they came to the university, and how they died. That's explicitly what that is. It says at the end, "The faculty apologize for their predecessors' role in the institution of slavery on April 20th, 2004: this plaque honors those whose labor and legacy of perseverance helped to build the university... community since its founding." That in itself is also ironic. Faculty apologizing for slavery when there's this whole idea around apologizing for something. "Oh, well it wasn't us and my great-granddad didn't own slaves," or, "You weren't a slave, so why does it bother you?" All of these things and then there's also the white apologist viewpoint of that where it's like, "Well, I'm sorry that my ancestors owned slaves, so don't hate us for it. Don't hate me for it." Just having that explicitly written there I thought was something else that was very interesting for students, especially black students, to have to read. "Sorry for owning

slaves," basically.

For Kayla, these graves are more than just memorials that recognize the slaves buried there. For her they, like the building names previously discussed, serve as a constant reminder of US's racist and segregated history.

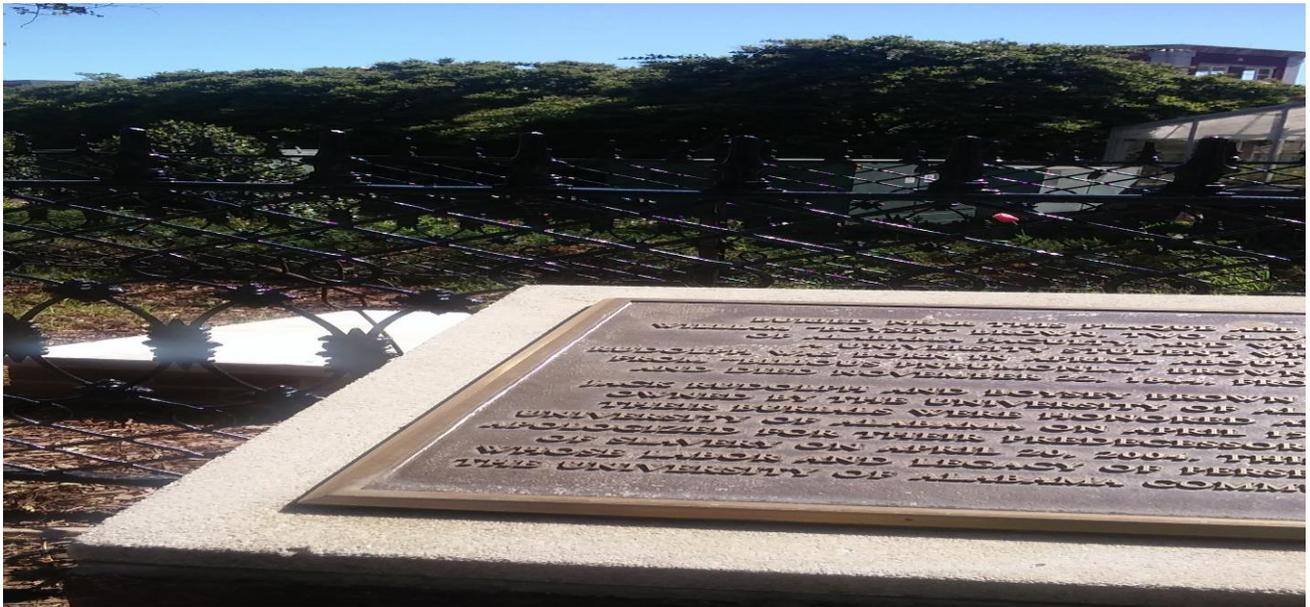


Figure 5: Slave Plaques at the University

Theme #1: Social Relationships

As previously mentioned, the personal relationships that students develop during their college years are important when determining student success (see Chang, 2005; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Museus & Harris, 2010; Phinney & Haas, 2003; Rodriguez et. al, 2003). When it comes to Black women making friends at PWIs, the process of doing so can be just as different as the women themselves. Many of the women expressed feelings of not fitting in with their non-Black peers as a result of their race and a lack of common background and/or interests while others expressed difficulties forming meaningful relationships with other Black women. Additionally, a few of the women discussed their interracial social relationships and how they have impacted their experiences as Black female students at the University of the

South. While all of the women shared their difficulties and/or frustrations with forming relationships with others, it is important to mention that they all discussed the relationships that they were able to cultivate with others and how they have impacted them in positive ways.

Sub-theme: Friendships

While all of the women discussed friendships with others on some level or another, this particular topic seemed to be more important to some of them. For example, Leona's experiences as a Black female student at a PWI were heavily influenced by the relationships she formed with others. For Leona, forming relationships with others was difficult at the beginning of her collegiate experience due to how others perceived her on campus:

I think me being from Houston kind of really sets me apart from other Black people on our campus who are from [the state]...just mannerisms, the way that I talk. It's very different. Some people thought, some Black people have thought that I was from California or some people called me a "skater boy" or something like that because of the way that I talked. My white peers, I think they don't know how to place me because I'm not the stereotypical Black person. I speak well and that's not part of the stereotype...I have a long board and I like to long board around campus when I have time. That's not part of the stereotype. So, I feel like people don't know how to place me sometimes.

Additionally, Leona stated that the fact that she is obviously "mixed with something" has led to problems forming relationships with others because they are unable to figure out what she is.

Half Black and half Vietnamese, Leona was raised by a Black family and identifies as Black because it is her "culture." Despite identifying as a Black woman, Leona expressed difficulties in forming relationships with her Black female peers:

I do know that my freshman year, making friends with other Black women. I'm not sure why that is but it was just difficult and perhaps they couldn't place me either or didn't know where I was coming from with them. But it was very difficult for me to make friends in that way.

Difficulties relating to other Black women led her to seek membership in an all-Black sorority. While Leona ultimately realized that sorority life was not for her, she continued to look for other ways to form relationships with others. For example, Leona shared during our sessions that she experimented with drugs as way to not only cope with the stresses she faced on a day-to-day basis but also to bond with others:

“I had smoked weed before in high school...but when I came to college I did it more often. I did it as a way to bond with other people. And then after that I think I started to really abuse it as a way to cope. And not just marijuana but other drugs.”

While Leona initially struggled to form meaningful relationships with other Black women, she ultimately was able to form relationships with a few of her Black female counterparts as a result of their common interests to expose and combat the racism that they encountered on campus. In particular, Leona discussed her relationship with her best friend, Nia, another socially active Black female student at the University of the South. When discussing one of her photos, Leona discussed their relationship in terms of their commitment to on-campus social justice initiatives as well as their non-working relationship:

...so this is a picture of my friend Nia and she's drinking wine um... I took a picture of it because it just shows like the happiness of the times when we're able to turn up and when we're able to just be students and not be student activists or student leaders or student professionals, just students. It's nice to be able to do that and so here I just wanted to take a picture of that...it tells us I guess, there aren't many people that I'm able to just relax with and so I have like this small group of people that I'm able to do that with and Nia's one of them.



Figure 6: Nia Drinking Wine

While this excerpt describes an example of a successful relationship Leona has been able to form as a student at the University of the South, it also demonstrates how difficult it has been for her to cultivate this type of connection with other students, or more particularly other Black women.

Kayla also discussed difficulties forming personal relationships. For Kayla, her problems in this area stemmed from a lack of similarities between her and others on campus, mainly her non-Black peers:

...I didn't have any common similarities with the people that I was around, except for the fact that the dorm that I lived in was specifically for freshman for the [liberal arts] program. So, other than that, I didn't have any other types of connections with other students. On the off chance that I would meet other Black girls, we didn't have that kind of connection.

In spite of these difficulties, Kayla found that as she became more involved on campus, more and more began to recognize her which made it somewhat easier to form relationships with others.

While she still found it difficult to form relationships with certain groups, like Leona she turned

to joining an all-Black sorority in order to connect with others. In fact, both young women pledged the same sorority though it is unclear if they did so at the same time. As an active member and leader within her sorority, Kayla found that her friend groups have changed since the beginning of her college experience. She stated that she had a more diverse group of friends as far as ethnicity is concerned initially, however, that has changed and now she finds herself surrounded “predominantly around Black people.”

Alyssa also discussed how difficult it was making friends with others while at US. For Alyssa, like the other women who participated in the project, a lack of common interests and background between her and others was to blame:

...I was invited to “Fried Fridays” by one of my friends on the Greek Council. At first I did not want to go because I’m going to go to this huge sorority house where I know one girl. There’s going to be all kinds of people there, people that don’t look anything like me and I probably have nothing in common with but I realized that’s not true because we already have something in common. We already all go to the University of the South. We might have majors in common. We have the fact that we are Greek in common. So of course I went and I got what I was expecting, nobody there necessarily looked like me but it was fun all the same.

This event encouraged Alyssa to branch out and establish friendships with a diverse group of people. Even though a few of the women discussed difficulties forming relationships with their non-Black peers on campus, Alyssa seemed to have an easier time doing so. Alyssa credits her involvement in Theta Tau as a possible explanation for her diverse friend group. When discussing the first photo that she took for this project, Alyssa shared the following:

In this photo, it was a group of me and four of my friends at [dinner at a restaurant on campus]. We had just come from a Science Olympiad volunteering opportunity....We didn’t want to leave each other. These are my fraternity brothers....I took a picture of this because I was like, ‘this is a very diverse group. I’m normally part of this type of group....’

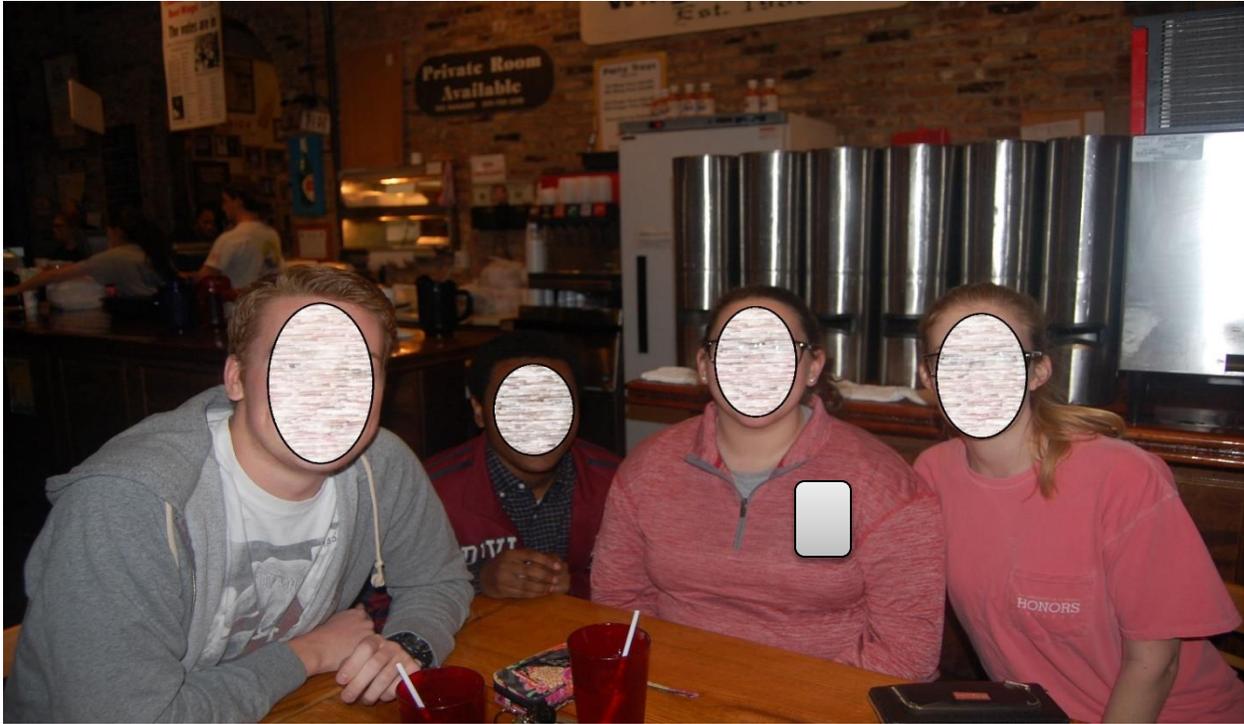


Figure 7: Alyssa's Friends at Restaurant

Alyssa also discussed the relationship she has with her best friends. At one point during her preliminary interview, Alyssa discussed her friendship with her gay best friend, Terrence. The relationship she had with Terrence was important because prior to them meeting she had very little knowledge of the LGBTQ community. According to Alyssa, their friendship has “broadened her horizon.” For example, she is now more aware of the language that she uses to describe others. In addition to her friendship with Terrence, Alyssa also discussed her relationship with her two white best friends during her session to discuss her photos:

These are my two best friends....These are the girls that I have been friends with since my freshman year. Of course you can look at us and tell that we are all very different. We come from totally different backgrounds....Coming together was easy for us. What I love about our relationship is that it's so effortless. We don't ignore that we are of different races. We talk about it and ask questions.

Alyssa also stated that her personal growth is due a large part to her “surrounding herself with these type of people.”



Figure 8: Alyssa and Her Best Friends

While Alyssa is accustomed to spending time with a diverse group of friends, she went on to express her frustrations with the assumptions that others make about her interracial friendships:

I don't understand why there has to be a stereotype of you should only have these certain type of friends. If you are Black or if you are white you should only hang out with people who look like you. I don't understand that, there's more to life than that.

When asked what she would change about her experiences at the university, Alyssa commented that she wished that the environment at US was more conducive to forming more diverse relationships. According to Alyssa, "there's an atmosphere where people are afraid to approach me on some level because I am Black. I wish that didn't exist."

Brandy also discussed her personal relationships with others on campus. Like Alyssa, Brandy's friend groups was more diverse. In fact, during our second session Brandy mentioned

that even though she is a Black female she has few connections with the Black community:

“...as much as it pains me to say, I’m not as connected to the Black community as I should be.”

Additionally, Brandy discussed how she is treated differently because of her white friends and how this has affected her experiences at US. When discussing how the campus environment has affected her experiences, Brandy said:

I also think that I’ve been blessed at that point too. I know there’s racism on campus...I’m not oblivious to the obvious. But have I experienced it firsthand? I would probably say not as much as others have maybe because of the people I surround myself with. That’s why I’m blocked off from it.

While she acknowledges that making friends has not always been easy because of her white classmates’ preconceived notions about Black women, she mentioned that it changed as people got to know her, “...once they get to know me and they start to talk to me, they’re like ‘wait, this girl’s really smart’...I made a lot of friends like that.”

Analysis:

Identifying and implementing theoretical constructs that can be used to gain a better understanding of the daily lives and experiences of Black women that attend PWIs can be challenging. Traditionally, theories related to the socialization process that university students undergo have been very general (Hamilton-Howard, 2003) and based on the experiences of students that are part of the dominant culture. These theories fail to account for the different experiences Black students, in general, and Black female students, in particular, that attend predominantly white institutions of higher education face. Considering this, the socialization of Black female students at PWIs has been discussed within frameworks based on the perceptions of members of the dominant society. This is problematic because it fails to account for the complex and multi-faceted lives led by Black female students. In order to appropriately discuss their experiences, the focus should be on selecting and applying theories that focus on the

“cultural, personal, and social contexts” (Howard-Hamilton, 2003) that inform their experiences. Black Feminist Thought is one example of a theoretical framework that can be used to address the issues Black women face as students at PWIs. Collins (1986, 2000) identifies three key themes in Black Feminist Thought. The first theme consists of the production of a standpoint created for and by Black women. In other words, despite the fact that others can record Black Feminist Thought, Black women produce it. The second theme assumes that there are commonalities among Black women that provide them with a collective experience. And finally, that despite these commonalities, “the diversity of class, region, age and sexual orientation” (Collins, 1986, p. 16) work together to create unique experiences that define particular Black women.

For Collins (2000), Black women have occupied marginalized positions in society and the experiences shared by the women in this study demonstrate how this marginalized status manifests itself at institutions of higher education as well. This marginalized position represents what Collins refers to “outsider-within” status. According to Collins (1986):

On the one hand, Black women who undergo sociology’s lengthy socialization process, who immerse themselves in the pattern of sociology’s group life, certainly wish to acquire the insider skills when thinking in and acting according to a sociological worldview. But on the other hand, Black women’s experienced realities, both prior to and after initiation, may provide them with ‘special perspectives and insights...available to that category of outsiders who have been systematically frustrated by the social system’ (Merton, 1972, 29).

The presence of this “outsider-within” status is evident when we consider the stories shared by the women in this study. While this “outsider-within” status will be used to discuss their various experiences across the salient themes identified, this current section focuses on exploring how

their “outsider-within” status impacts the social relationships that the Black women studied have with others on campus.

According to Collins (2000), the convergence of race, gender and class impact the relationships that Black women form communally, professionally and intellectually. While all of these types of relationships are important to the daily lives and experiences of Black female students, the focus here will be on using Black Feminist Thought to analyze the social relationships described by the participants. A central tenet of Black Feminist Thought deals with that of standpoint which argues that the struggle Black women face against racism and sexism represents a common bond among Black women. While not all of the interactions between Black women on campus were positive, overall there was a positive view of the importance of these types of relationships. For Kayla and Leona, their status as “outsiders” within the dominant campus environment, made it difficult for them to form meaningful relationships with their white peers due to a lack of commonalities. This inability to form meaningful relationships with their non-Black peers, led them to intentionally seeking out relationships with other Black women. For example, they both, as previously mentioned, sought membership in an all-Black sorority as a way to form relationships with others. For Kayla, her involvement in her sorority was a positive one which is marked by her continued participation with the organization. Not only has her involvement with her sorority provided her with the chance to form relationships with other Black women, it also helped her establish herself as a leader in her sorority and on-campus. Additionally, Kayla’s involvement in her sorority has helped her establish social relationships with other members of the Black Greek community, both males and females. Different than Kayla, Leona’s involvement in the Black Greek community, Leona’s involvement was short lived. While she preferred not to elaborate on why she decided to drop out of the sorority, she did

share how fulfilling her relationships with Black women like her friend Nia are to her. Not only did they bond over their shared racial and gendered backgrounds, the two women also found common ground through their commitment to social justice initiatives on campus.

While Kayla and Leona made concerted efforts to seek out social relationships with other Black students on campus, a few of the participants discussed their interracial relationships. Both Alyssa and Brandy talked a great deal about their diverse friend groups and the impact they have had on their daily lives and experiences. Collins' notion of "outsider-within" can also be used to explore these relationships. Different than Leona and Kayla, Alyssa and Brandy were able to establish more diverse friend groups as a result of their "insider" status within the university's dominant culture. For Alyssa and Brandy, their "insider" status is the result of their proximity or close relationships they have formed with their white peers. When discussing the Black domestic workers in white families, Collins (1990) stated the following:

Mothers who are domestic workers or who work in proximity to White may experience a unique relationship with the dominant group. For example, African-American women domestics are exposed to all the intimate details of the lives of their White employers. Working for Whites offers domestic workers view from the inside and exposes them to ideas and resources that might aid in their children's upward mobility. In some cases domestic workers form close, long-lasting relationships with their employers. (p. 184)

Even though she is discussing the relationships that Black women develop with the white families they work for, this same line of thinking can be used to discuss the interracial relationships Alyssa and Brandy have developed over the years as students at US. Both women discussed in great detail how important these relationships have been to them and how they have benefited from these types of interactions especially when it comes to on-campus activities and leadership opportunities. For example, when discussing how she successfully gained a seat on the SGA during last year's election, Brandy shared that she was able to get support from many of

her white female peers on campus because she had at least one friend in each sorority house which gave her access to a space that is normally closed off to Black students. Alyssa also discussed her diverse friend groups and how they have affected her experiences at US. For example, during her preliminary interview Alyssa discussed how the campus environment not only determined the types of relationships she made but also how she dressed and the type of organizations she joined:

I know that I would have had a very different experience if I went to an HBCU. I know that I would've probably joined an NPHC organization. I know that I probably would have been part of the Black Student Union. I probably would have done a lot of things differently. I would have to say the campus culture has affected me even probably even to the way I dress necessarily. I wear a lot more school gear than I probably would if I went somewhere else. I wear a lot more leggings and t-shirts to class because you kind of blend in that way...and it's comfortable....

This quote from Alyssa demonstrates that her “insider” status not only influences the types of friendships she cultivates but also in the activities she participates in and the way she dresses. For Alyssa and Brandy, their status as “insiders” has placed them within the dominant culture of the university while at the same time establishing them as “outsiders” within the Black student community at US. Both women discussed, at different points during the project, that they had very little, if any, ties to the Black community at US. However, it is important to mention that despite their “insider” status within the campus culture, both women discussed negative interactions with white classmates and faculty members on campus.

Theme #2: Challenges

In addition to issues related to forming personal relationships with others on campus, Black female students at PWIs also face a variety of other challenges. For the women involved in this study, the challenges they faced day in, day out included difficulties overcoming the stereotypes imposed upon on them by others, as well as a lack of community and on-campus

resources and support. Additionally, this section explores various racial incidents that have impacted their experiences. In the section that follows, the participants discuss various challenges related to these areas. Additionally, this section explores how they, in some cases, were able to overcome some of these challenges.

Sub-theme: Stereotypes

A common topic discussed among all of the women dealt with the impact that stereotypes had on their experiences at US. For the participants, negative understandings of what it is to be a Black woman impacted them in terms of their performance inside and outside the classroom. For example, a few of the women discussed how the opinions of their white classmates and professors made it difficult for them to voice their opinions in class. Other women discussed how the negative stereotypes imposed on them made it difficult for them to assert themselves in leadership roles. While the negative impact of these stereotypes were discussed, many of the women also talked about how they used them as motivation.

For example, Brandy discussed the role that stereotypes has had in her experiences as a Black female student at the University of the South. As previously mentioned in her profile, Brandy talked a lot about how important it is for Black women at US to work hard so that they don't have "to be the statistic." However, while Brandy acknowledges that she and other Black women have to overcome these obstacles, she also recognized that she has privileged to a certain extent:

I think I have been privileged to not be seen as too different. I think sometimes you just have to prove herself. People have those pre-notions on what they think you're going to be. They think you're going to be a stupid Black girl, or just ratchet¹³.

¹³ The term "ratchet" is slang used to describe people that act in an unfavorable way. An updated version of the term "ghetto", the term "ratchet" has been used to describe people that are loud and often times disrespectful particularly in public places.

Regardless of her privilege, Brandy discussed an incident on campus where she was confronted with an example of the type of stereotypes she and other Black women on campus encounter:

...I was eating with a bunch of my friends and after we finished eating, this Caucasian kid said to me 'I've never met a Black person like you' and I said 'what?!' I was kind of thrown off at that point and said 'what do you mean?'. He said, 'you don't speak ratchet and you don't act ratchet or anything like that' and I said 'not all Black people are like that. There are educated Black people.'

This incident was one of the reasons that Brandy wanted to participate in this study. According to Brandy, "...I think what you're doing for African American females will get people to start doing research on this..."

Kayla also discussed the role of stereotypes of in her daily life and experiences. Though she did not have a specific incident like the one described by Brandy, Kayla talked about her experiences with her white peers in general. When talking about her peers that did not have "interpersonal connections" with Blacks, Kayla said:

...some have this idea in their head of what Black women are like or who they are. I remember hearing a lot my freshman year, 'I've never met a Black girl like you before.' At first I was said 'Yeah, we're out. I don't know what you mean.' And then I came to the understanding that there was this sort of ingrained sense of what Blackness was for some of my classmates....

According to Kayla, while these types of interactions were "discerning and very disheartening", they happened less after her freshman year. For Kayla, getting involved more in on-campus activities helped facilitate this change because "people were understanding that there isn't one kind of Blackness, especially when it comes to Black women."

Even though Kayla acknowledged that her involvement in on-campus activities helped change the perceptions that some of her white peers had about who she is as a Black woman, she also pointed out the fact that becoming a member of the Black Greek community at US imposed a "whole separate set of norms" on her:

...now that I am in the Greek community, I am predominantly around Black people when I'm not in class, basically my free time. And that comes with its own set of challenges about how I'm supposed to act or how I'm perceived especially when it comes to social versus professional realms because you're going to have your parties, then you're going to have your chapter meetings, and then you're going to have your other meeting with other councils...everyone has their idea of how I'm supposed to be and it can be very conflicting and very difficult trying to balance that.

Additionally, Kayla talked about how being aware of how others saw her was a constant source of struggle:

...it gave me a little bit of an outside lens to see how people thought about Black women and then how they were projecting that onto myself. And so I felt sometimes at odds. How should I act in this particular moment? Should I be like this? Should I be this way? Can I just be myself? You know, kind of warring with that.

Kayla, when talking about how about she wishes people would take her more seriously in professional and academic settings, shared how these types of situations “were extremely hurtful” and how they didn't make sense to her.

However, despite these challenges, Kayla also discussed how her cultural identity has grown as a result of the various experiences she has had with others:

...I feel like I have grown a lot in terms of my cultural identity since I have been in college. I was one of those people, before I came [here], that said ‘Oh, I'm not like those Black people’ and so I have matured a lot, learned a lot about myself and grown because I was having these experiences with people who really thought ‘all Black girls are loud and they're this and they're that...’ Hearing that from people that I didn't know was kind of a wakeup call for me.

For Kayla and a few of the other women that participated in this project, being Black was not salient prior to their attending the University of the South. While they knew that they were Black, they thought of themselves as different than other Blacks and thought they had more in common with their white peers. However, upon experiencing racism firsthand at US many of the women found themselves forced to think about who they are as Black women. For Kayla this led

to the realization that despite her efforts to not be like “those” Black people, she would automatically be associated with “those” Black people due to the pre-conceived notions of others.

Alyssa also discussed the role that stereotypes have had on her experiences at the university. Although Alyssa has a more diverse friend group than some of the other women involved in the study, her tenure as President of UGC brought the preconceived ideas that many had about her to the forefront:

...I was the second UGC President. It was a big leap because the first UGC President was of course a white man. The move to me was a transition I believe for people that had to work with me. They see my name, Alyssa [], they assume that they are going to meet a different type of person. I’m definitely not what they figured would walk through the door. There is essentially no difference between me and the person they assumed was going to walk through the door. There is no reason they can’t work with me. If they can find a reason, it’s their own.

Alyssa also shared the following when discussing her interactions with members of the UGC:

...the way we’re perceived when we walk into the room, I noticed being on UGC, dealing with the IFC guys, they are automatically intimidated by my presence. It’s like, I’m a 5 feet tall girl who is usually quiet in a room of people I don’t know and there’s no reason you should be intimidated by my presence. I haven’t said and or done anything to you. But, when I walk in they already assume ‘oh, here’s another angry Black girl’ or even just the opposite, here’s a girl who is Black but she’s not “Black”. Yeah, like I wish that, I wish we didn’t have to be perceived one or two ways.

As the President of a predominantly white council, Alyssa used the opportunity to “break down some walls.”

In addition to her experiences with UGC, Alyssa also discussed how she has overcome stereotypes related to the Black women and their personal interests. A self-described “comic book nerd”, Alyssa is very proud of her comic book knowledge even though she recognizes that

it is not necessarily a Black girl thing. When discussing one of her photos, Alyssa shared that the “picture is very important to me. I generally don’t talk about that because it’s unacceptable in a way for a Black girl to be into comics.” At another point in the interview Alyssa shared the following incident that occurred one day on campus while she was waiting for one of her classes to start:

This guy walked over to me and asked me what I was reading and I started quizzing me on my knowledge of the comic....Of course I am answering his questions and I’m like ‘wait, why are you asking?’...He says ‘well, I’ve never seen a Black girl read a comic book before’ and I said ‘that’s a little ridiculous, they are public domain. No one has a monopoly on them.’ I’m very proud of that because that’s definitely not something you think of when you’re looking at a Black girl....

For Alyssa, her love of comic books is more than a hobby. Comic books describe, in her own words “another side of me that you wouldn’t see by looking at me.”

In her narrative, Neo also discussed the role that stereotypes has played in her life as a student and also in her personal life. For Neo, many of the experiences that have defined who she is outside the university have carried over into her experiences at US. For example, when discussing her skin tone, Neo shared that she has had to deal with the stereotypes that others have about light skinned people and her experiences at US have not been any different. According to Neo, others “really get into your head that because you’re light skinned, you’re this or because you’re light skinned, you’re considered white.” Neo, who would like to join a NPHC sorority, also discussed how others make assumptions about which organization she should join based solely on her complexion. When recounting a conversation she and one of friends had with a male member of one of the NPHC fraternities, Neo shared the following:

...we were talking to him and we said ‘yeah, we want to pledge’. ...He said, ‘you want to be this and you want to be that’. I said ‘well, why do you think I want to be this? Is it because I’m light skinned and you think I want to be this, and she’s brown skinned so she wants to be that?’...And he

couldn't say anything.

In another instance Neo also discussed how others stereotypes have negatively impacted her roommates as well. When discussing an article she was inspired to write as a result of her participation in this study, Neo shared the following:

I have three light skinned roommates and one brown skin roommate. We're all completely different, but we're all the same....One of my roommates, she feels like she's not supposed to go here because she's not supposed to be able to afford it or she's not supposed to feel smart enough to go here. She says she is constantly being oppressed by her classmates....

Based on the information presented in this section, confronting stereotypes or the preconceived notions that others about what it means to be a Black woman is source of struggle and pride for the women that chose to participate in this study. Regardless of where they fall on that spectrum, the ideas that others have about them have helped to shape their experiences as students a predominantly white institution.

Analysis:

Stereotypes used to describe Black women are historical and formed as the result of structural differences such as race, gender and socio-economic status. Collins (2000) identifies different “controlling images” that have been used historically to describe Black women. The first image is that of the Mammy. Created in order to “justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black women’s long-standing restriction to domestic service, the Mammy image represents the normative yardstick to evaluate all Black women’s behavior” (p. 72). Used to portray Black women as faithful and obedient domestic workers, the Mammy image not only represents the Black woman’s acceptance of her subordination but is also instrumental in perpetuating oppression “by teaching Black children their assigned place in white power structures...” (Collins, 2000, p. 73). Additionally, the Mammy image serves to maintain

differences related to gender and sexuality. According to Collins (2000), when “juxtaposed against images of white women, the Mammy image as the Other symbolizes the oppositional difference of mind/body and culture/nature thought to distinguish Black women from everyone else” (p. 73). Similar to the Mammy, the image of the Matriarch is important when it comes to discussing interlocking forms of oppression. For Collins (2000), this representation of Black women allows White men and women to blame Black women for their children’s failures in school and with the law, as well as Black children’s subsequent poverty” (p. 73). Instrumental in justifying the economic exploitation and the persistent socioeconomic position of Blacks, the Matriarch image also serves as a way to determine Black women’s behavior:

the image of the Black Matriarch serves as a powerful symbol for both Black and White women of what can go wrong if White patriarchal power is challenged. Aggressive, assertive women are penalized—they are abandoned by their men, end up impoverished, and are stigmatized as being unfeminine. The Matriarch or overly strong Black woman has also been used to influence Black men’s understandings of Black masculinity. Many Black men reject Black women as marital partners, claiming that Black women are less desirable than White ones because we are too assertive. (Collins, 2000, p. 77)

Additionally, the Matriarch image can be used to “support racial oppression” (Collins, 2000, p. 77) through their perceived “cultural deficiency” (Collins, 2000, p. 77) that occurs as a result of their inability to “conform to the cult of true womanhood” (Collins, 2000, p. 77). A third image, the Welfare Mother, is another example of an externally defined stereotype that has been imposed upon Black women. According to Collins (2000), the Welfare Mother image was created in order to justify the white patriarchal societies desire to control the fertility of Black women:

Creating the controlling image of the Welfare Mother and stigmatizing her as the cause of her own poverty and that of African-American communities shifts the angle of vision away from structural sources of poverty and blames

the victims themselves. The image of the Welfare Mother thus provides ideological justification for the dominant group's interest in limiting the fertility of Black mothers who are seen as producing too many economically unproductive children. (p. 80)

Additionally, Collins (2000) maintains that this image was essential to maintaining patriarchal control of Black women after Black women "gained more political power and demanded equity in access to state services" (p. 78). A modernized version of the Breeder Woman image prevalent during slavery, the Welfare Mother image "evolved into the more pernicious image of the welfare queen" (Collins, 2000, p. 80) after Reagan was elected President in 1980. While also created to demonstrate the Black woman's reliance on the welfare system, the welfare queen differs from the Welfare Mother:

In contrast to the Welfare Mother who draws upon the moral capital attached to American motherhood, the welfare queen constitutes a highly materialistic, domineering, and manless working-class Black woman. Relying on the public dole, Black welfare queens are content to take the hard-earned money of tax-paying Americans and remain married to the state. Thus, the welfare queen image signals efforts to use the situation of working-class Black women as a sign of the deterioration of the state. (Collins, 2000, p. 80)

Despite their differences, both the Welfare Mother and welfare queen, like the other "controlling images" discussed by Collins (2000) offer "ideological justifications for intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class" (p. 79). In the first place, these images promote the idea that a woman can only be valuable and financially stable if they have a husband. Additionally, it promotes the belief that Black women are to blame for their socioeconomic status which switches the attention away from the "structural sources of poverty" (Collins, 2000, p. 80). Developed at the same time as the image of the welfare queen, the Black lady image:

builds upon prior images of Black womanhood in many ways. For one thing, this image seems to be yet another version of the modern

Mammy, namely, the hardworking Black woman professional who works twice as hard as everyone else. The image of the Black lady also resembles aspects of the Matriarchy thesis—Black ladies have jobs that are so all-consuming that they have no time for men or have forgotten how to treat them. Because they so routinely compete with men and are successful at it, they become less feminine. Highly educated Black ladies are deemed to be too assertive—that’s why they cannot get men to marry them.

According to Collins (2000) the interconnected nature of the welfare queen and Black lady work together to discredit Black women within patriarchal society and deny them their natural rights as citizens. The final controlling image discussed by Collins (2000) is that of the Jezebel, an image created during slavery. According to Collins:

the Jezebel, whore, or “hoochie”—is central in this nexus of controlling images of Black womanhood. Because efforts to control Black women’s sexuality lie at the heart of Black women’s oppression, historical Jezebels and contemporary “hoochies” represent a deviant Black female sexuality. (p. 81)

Representing Black women as sexually aggressive Jezebels provided “a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White women typically reported by Black slave women” (Collins, 2000, p. 81). However, different than its historical predecessor, the contemporary Jezebel or “hoochie” is different because it has “permeated everyday Black culture in entirely new ways” (Collins, 2000, p. 82). For example, the image of the “hoochie” is a central one to hip hop music. According to Collins, this image is particularly problematic because of Black men and women’s acceptance of the image:

The issue here lies in African-American acceptance of such images. African-American men and women alike routinely do not challenge these and other portrayals of Black women as “hoochies” within Black popular culture. For example, despite the offensive nature of much of 2 Live Crew’s music, some Blacks argued that such views, while unfortunate, had long been expressed in Black culture....The more it circulates among U.S. Blacks, the more credence it is given. (Collins, 2000, p. 82)

The acceptance of this image, particularly in hip hop, is not only problematic because of Black peoples' acceptance of them but also because they downplay the financial benefit of the record companies and the media which tend to be white owned and operated enterprises.

While all of the images here are different and represent various periods of history in the United States, they all work together to form the basis for explaining the patriarchal society's interest in defining Black womanhood. As we have seen in this brief overview of the "controlling images" described by Collins (2000), the Black woman's sexuality, whether asexual or hypersexual, is at the core of these images. Additionally, we have seen that exploiting Black women's fertility for economical reasons is equally important. Despite the fact that the "controlling images" discussed are historical, they provide a good background for understanding the origin of many of the stereotypes Black women face on a daily basis.

Stereotypes based on markers of difference such as, but not limited to, race, class and gender can have detrimental effects on Black women (see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1999). First, these stereotypes impact how Black women see themselves. Second, and perhaps more importantly, these stereotypes determine how others see Black women and their role in society. When we think about the experiences shared by the women involved in this project we can see the effects that the "controlling images" have on the daily lives of these Black women.

Black Women as the Other: Interactions with White Peers

According to Collins (2000), Black women endure an "ideology of domination" (p. 106) on a daily basis—an ideology based on intersecting oppressions that automatically labels them as the Others in society: "As the Others, U.S. Blacks are assigned all of the negative characteristics opposite to and inferior to those reserved for Whites" (p. 89). For example, when discussing her experiences, Brandy mentioned the importance of working hard to overcome statistics. In

particular, she discussed the importance of overcoming statistics related to teenage pregnancy in the Black community. For Brandy, it is important “to show people that African American women can do things. We’re not someone who will get pregnant before they go to college...” While recent statistics (2014) show that the number of teen birth rates are higher for Black females than their white counterparts, there has been a 44% decline in teen birth rates among Blacks since 2007 (see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). However, despite this decline, Brandy still feels pressured to overcome this statistic due to stereotypes related to Black women and their reproductive abilities. Created at the beginning of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, these types of stereotypes were used in order to justify slavery and the poor treatment of Blacks by disassociating them from qualities normally attributed to whites (Hall, 1997). The image of the Black woman as hyper-fertile can be viewed as a residual effect of slavery despite the fact that slavery ended centuries ago. According to Collins (2000):

Efforts to control Black women’s sexuality were tied directly to slave owners’ efforts to increase the number of children their female slaves produced. Historian Deborah Gray White (2011) writes, ‘Slave masters wanted adolescent girls to have children, and to this end they practiced a passive, though insidious kind of breeding’ (p. 20). Techniques such as assigning pregnant women lighter workloads, giving pregnant women more attention and rations, and rewarding prolific women with bonuses were all used to increase Black women’s reproduction. Punitive measures were also used. Interfile women could expect to be treated ‘like barren sows and be passed from one unsuspecting buyer to the next’ (White, 2011, 22).

In addition to discussing her desire to overcome stereotypes associated with teenage pregnancy in the Black community, Brandy also discussed how she has had to confront other people’s pre-conceived notions about who she is as a Black woman. For example, when discussing an interaction in the dining hall with a white classmate, Brandy shared how she felt the need to inform him that “there are educated Black people.” Neo, when discussing her roommates, shared that one of her roommates constantly feels oppressed by her classmates

because she feels as if she is “not supposed to feel smart enough to go here.” Like the image of Black women as hyper-fertile, the often held assumption that Black people are uneducated and dumb are also results of the legacy of slavery. Also used in order to justify their inferior treatment, this stereotype has also been used to explain their exploitation.

In addition to confronting stereotypes related to pregnancy and education, the participants also discussed how they had to confront stereotypes related to different types of Black womanhood. For example, Kayla, during her preliminary interview, discussed incidents with her white peers when they told her that they had “never met a Black girl like her before.” While she admits that she was shocked at first, she said that she ultimately began to realize that their understanding of what it meant to be a Black woman was based on the negative stereotypes that they had accepted as true. Brandy also discussed this during her preliminary interview when she talked about how her peers initially assumed that she was “going to be a stupid Black girl, or just ratchet”. While their peers meant for their comments to be compliments, both women received them negatively. In addition to Kayla and Brandy, Alyssa also discussed similar situations with her white peers. For example, when discussing her time as President of UGC, Alyssa discussed how she had to combat the stereotypes imposed upon her by her non-Black peers. In particular, Alyssa discussed her interactions with members of different interfraternity organizations who assumed that she was either “...another angry Black girl... or “not really Black.” Additionally, Alyssa discussed how she has had to overcome other people’s pre-conceived notions about her interests. For example, when discussing an incident with a male classmate on campus, Alyssa shared how she had to defend her love of comic books after he stated that he had “never seen a Black girl read a comic before.” While comic books have historically been a guy thing, women readers of comic books are on the rise. In particular, the number of Black women who read

comic books is growing thanks to the work of Black women comic book creators like Cheryl Lynn Eaton and others who are working to “dispel the cookie-cutter stereotype surrounding female readers”.

Despite the differences in their experiences, all of the women involved in this project, at various points during their academic career, have found themselves confronted with negative stereotypes imposed upon them. From discussing having to work hard to overcome negative stereotypes associated with Black women to challenging assumptions about the types of knowledge they possess, Black women find themselves struggling on a daily basis to undermine these negative stereotypes.

Black vs. Black: Interactions with Black Peers

In addition to discussing the pre-conceived notions of their white peers and their influence on their daily lives and experiences, a few of the participants also discussed the pressure they have felt when it comes to stereotypes imposed upon by their Black peers. For example, Kayla discussed how joining the Black Greek community has presented its own challenges. As previously mentioned, BGLOs were founded on college campuses across the country at the beginning of the 20th century. While historically they provided opportunities for Black students to participate in fraternal organizations, their presence has come into question in recent years (Patton et. al, 2000). According to Patton & Bonner (2001):

With their longstanding tradition of scholarship, leadership, community service, and social activism, these organizations have served as an aegis of protection for the African American collegiate and non-collegiate community against a number of social and political forays; yet they have not existed without their share of controversy and negative press. (p. 17)

Despite some questioning their viability and/or purpose today, a few of the participants discussed

the role that the Black Greek community has played in their experiences at US. For example, when discussing how she turned to the Black Greek community after failing to form meaningful relationships with her white classmates, Kayla expressed frustration with having to figure out how to best present herself in social and professional settings. According to Kayla, “everyone has their idea of how I’m supposed to be and it can be very conflicting and very difficult trying to balance that.” This dual awareness or “double consciousness” (DuBois, 1903) presents Kayla, and the other Black women in this project, with a struggle faced by many Black women outside of the university, a struggle based on forcing them to reconcile their identities as Black women who attend a predominantly white institution—identities that are based on multiple realities which are the result of their “outsider-within” status. As “outsiders” they are relegated to creating an identity that does not meet the necessary requirements (i.e. race, gender, class) to be part of the dominant campus environment which is problematic as previously discussed because of their close proximity to the dominant campus culture.

While Kayla shared her experiences with her Black peers in terms of how she should act in particular situations, Neo discussed the issue of colorism and its impact on her experiences. As a light-skinned Black woman, Neo expressed her frustration with being treated differently as a result of her complexion. According to Margaret Hunter (2007), colorism is best defined as “a process that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark in areas such as income, education, housing, and the marriage market” (p. 238). Like the stereotypes created and maintained by white society, colorism within the Black community is historical. According to Hunter (2007):

Colorism has roots in the European colonial project (Jordan, 1968), plantation life for enslaved African Americans (Stevenson, 1996), and the early class hierarchies of Asia (Rondilla and Spickard, 2007). Despite its disparate roots, today, colorism in the USA is broadly maintained by a

system of white racism (Feagin, Vera & Batur, 2001). The maintenance of white supremacy (aesthetic, ideological, and material) is predicated on the notion that dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority. White skin, and, thus, whiteness itself, is defined by the opposite: civility, rationality, beauty, and superiority. These contrasting definitions are the foundation for colorism. (p. 238)

Although the origins of colorism are historical, it continues to have an effect on Blacks on a daily basis. For example, Blacks often times critique the media for consistently featuring light-skinned Black women as models and in lead roles in both television and film. While most people assume that colorism provides lighter-skinned Blacks with a wealth of advantages, they fail to consider the detrimental effects it can have. For example, colorism can result in alienation, feelings of inadequacy in terms of their Blackness, and retaliation from darker-skinned Blacks. Like other related issues, Black women experience and are impacted by colorism in a variety of ways. For example, Leona briefly hinted at issues related to colorism during her preliminary interview when she discussed how forming relationships with other Black women on campus was difficult for her because they did not know how to “place” her because she was mixed. Neo discussed the effects of colorism in greater detail in her narrative. For Neo, dealing with colorism has presented many challenges in her life before and after she began attending the university, especially when it comes to interactions with other members of the Black community. During our sessions, Neo discussed how some of her Black peers automatically make assumptions about who she is as a Black woman. For example, when discussing her desire to join a NPHC sorority, Neo discussed an incident with a Black male peer on campus where he assumed that she wanted to be a member of a particular sorority because she was light-skinned and that her brown-skinned friend would be a good fit for another sorority. This assumption is based on the fact that “during the early part of the 20th century, social clubs, churches, fraternities, and sororities used a variety of methods to weed out potential dark skinned applicants to create and maintain social distance

between blacks with light skin” (Maddox & Gray, 2002, p.250). In the Black Greek community, certain organizations have been criticized for practicing elitism, classism, and colorism.

For example, AKAs (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated) are renowned for their light-skinned good looks, an image that is reflected by the words and gestures of their step routines, in which they use their hands to represent mirrors. In addition, “paper bag tests” have reportedly been used to determine the acceptability of candidates, denying membership to those whose skin is not lighter than a brown grocery bag. (Brown, Parks, & Phillips, 2012, p. 355)

While this method, and similar ones, were used by other organizations including some HBCUs during the beginning of the 20th century, they are now considered out-of-date and are no longer acceptable tests for determining whether a person is allowed membership in an organization. However, it is important to mention that colorism still does exist in today’s society and this incident with Neo is a prime example of how it still manifests itself.

Combating gender and racial stereotypes can have profound effects on the daily lives and experiences of Black female students both inside and outside the university classroom. Whether imposed upon them by their white peers or their Black classmates, these stereotypes not only influence how others see these Black women but also in how they see themselves. For the women involved in this study, negative stereotypes have impacted them in a variety of ways. From feelings of isolation to struggling to define themselves in different situations, the young women who participated in the project, through their personal struggles, demonstrate the importance of challenging these stereotypes and presenting counter-narratives that can be used to not only contradict them but replace them all together. Additionally, this section demonstrates the variety of experiences by the Black women and points to a key theme of this project which is to debunk the notion that there is a universal Black woman.

Theme #3: Campus Environment

As we saw in the review of the literature, institutional culture and the campus environment are important factors in the experiences of Black students that attend PWIs (see Rankin & Reason, 2005; Flowers, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). From issues related to exclusion (see Herndon and Hirt, 2004) to issues with the racial climate of PWIs (see Hurtado et. al, 1999) and the lack of support programs available (see Hawkins, 2013), Black women at PWIs face a variety of challenges that impact their daily lives and experiences. In the section that follows we explore the role the campus environment has on the Black women involved in this project.

Sub-theme: Community and Safe Spaces

Among the other challenges discussed by the participants, the need for community and safe spaces on campus were important topics of discussion. For these women, a sense of community, or lack thereof, has been an important defining feature of their experiences at the University of the South. Additionally, some of the women discussed the importance of having safe spaces on campus. While the term safe spaces can mean a variety of things, for the purposes of this project it is being used in two ways. On the one hand, some of the women discuss the need for safe spaces which provide them with opportunities to explore issues related to being a Black female on a predominantly white campus. On the other hand, the term safe space is being used to describe spaces provide particular women involved in the project an opportunity to explore their sexual identity. Considering this, the current section will discuss the challenges associated with the need for community and creating spaces on campus for Black women.

The term community can best be defined as a sense of fellowship with others which is the result of common attitudes, beliefs, interests and goals. In the same way that each woman and

her experiences are unique, the need for community and what it means to each participant is different. For example, Leona, over the course of the different phases of this project, spent a lot of time discussing her quest to find a community during her four years at the University of the South. Whether it was related to a community based on forming meaningful relationships with other Black members of the university community or a community on based on shared experiences, the search for these types of spaces were key to Leona navigating her years at the university. As previously mentioned, Leona shared how she had a hard time forming meaningful relationships with her peers on campus. And although she was ultimately able to develop personal relationships with a small group of like-minded individuals, she still found herself looking to form connections with others. For Leona, her relationship with the Black women that worked in the dining hall served as a way of creating a community “in an almost unlikely place.” During her secondary interview where we discussed her photos, Leona shared a few photos that showed that she was “seeking a community on campus.” When talking about her first photo which was a picture of the dining hall, Leona said:

...I took a picture of it because it's something that I really enjoy doing everyday. One of the aspects that I really enjoy about it is the people who work there. It's nice to see friendly Black faces that I can talk and that are interested in me. It's really nice to go there...if something's happening you can tell them what's going on...it serves as a community for me.



Figure 9: Students in Dining Hall

When describing her second photo, Leona shared how this community developed:

...at first I started talking to them frequently about day to day things and then from there my relationship with other crew members at [...] Dining Hall grew. This is kind of the genesis of my community building.

Leona also discussed the impact that this community has had on her daily life and experiences at US. For Leona, her interactions with the different dining hall crew members have “helped make her day” when she is not feeling all that great.



Figure 10: Staff Member and Students in Dining Hall

In addition to the type of community discussed above, Leona also discussed the importance of forming communities based on shared experiences with others that may be facing the same struggles. For example, during her preliminary interview Leona described attending an event where she shared a particular racial incident on campus:

I went to a forum and felt led to share that experience at the forum and many women came up to me afterwards telling me they've had similar experiences. It really hurt me to hear that more people were experiencing it than me....to hear that people other people had experienced it, I cared more about that...

For Alyssa, her idea of community is based on a sense of shared interests and experiences. In this case her community consisted of her fraternity house and its members. When discussing her photos, Alyssa shared the importance that her fraternity house has on daily life. Although it is “smaller” in relation to the other Greek houses on campus, the Theta Tau is where Alyssa “feels comfortable on campus.” According to Alyssa, she is comfortable in this space because “...that’s where my friends are, that’s where my brothers are.” Additionally, Alyssa discussed how her fraternity house, or more specifically its study room, provides her and her

fraternity brothers with a place to hang out but also provides them with a space for providing each other with academic support:

...it has improved my academic lifestyle. To have a group of people that are also studying. We might not be studying the same thing, but being in an area where we have to sit down is like, 'okay, everybody needs to get this done. We all need to focus. We can all do that together'. I feel that more people should have that type of opportunity. I guess you can have that in the library but it's different when you go with people you know.



Figure 11: Front of Alyssa's Fraternity House



Figure 12: Inside of Alyssa's Fraternity House

Similarly, Nichole discussed the importance of having these types of communities on campus based on shared interests and experiences. In her case, the term community represents a space where she can socialize and study with friends. When discussing a photo she took of Rodgers Library, Nichole said:

I spent a lot time in this place during midterms and finals, pulling all nighters. Not only was this place used for studying but it was a great place for socializing when we should have been studying. I've had some great nights with my friends in this place.



Figure 13: Inside of Library

Additionally, Miya discussed how she uses one of her professors' offices serves as a place to complete her work.

...I just want to study and get some work done and there's nowhere else that I can really do that where it's really quiet and I know that no one is going to disturb me.

She also talked about the social importance of her professor's office:

...I realized that there were some spaces that I've just never took pictures of. You know, those spaces were you feel really safe and really happy and you're just always doing something in it or you're talking to people.... Her office is one of those places because I'm always there.... You see the people that you're used to seeing and you talk and you can have conversations and you can study if you need to.

As we can see from the information discussed in this section, notions or understandings of community vary from participant to participant. While Leona searched for communal spaces based on forming relationships with other Blacks on campus and exploring common experiences, a few of the other women in the project focused on the need for communities or spaces on campus where they can socialize, pursue their academic goals and be with others on campus that share common interests.

Different than the notion of community, the need for safe spaces on campus focuses more

on finding areas on campus (physical and non-physical) where members of marginalized groups can come together to discuss issues relevant to their group members. Often times associated with the LGBTQ community, the term safe space has been extended in recent years to describe non-LGBTQ groups as well. In other words, safe spaces can refer to providing members of the LGBTQ community spaces with the chance to discuss concerns related to the exploration of their sexual identity or it can refer to safe spaces for Black students to share their experiences. Regardless of the group, safe spaces represent physical and non-physical spaces on campus where these students do are able to express themselves without fear of being uncomfortable or unsafe.

Of all of the women in the study, Miya discussed the need for community and safe spaces the most. As previously mentioned in her profile, Miya has found the LGBTQ spaces on campus as welcoming and unexpected. Miya made the following comments when discussing her experiences at US:

It's this weird mix of experiences where sometimes it's really isolating but other times you find pockets of people and finding those pockets fills a bit more special because they're not what you'd expect all the time. Just getting those pieces together is kind of part of what the experience here is like...on any campus you have to find your spaces but I feel like sometimes it can be harder to find those spaces but once you find them it's a lot more rewarding in a sense.

Additionally, during Miya shared a picture of the hallway in the Ferg that leads to the Safe Zone office. While Miya said that she does not spend a lot of time in this office, she took it because of her membership in Spectrum:

...this is also providing opportunities for improving lives but the way that we can talk about these things and talk about them together and have more awareness of different people and different ways of being. Even when you're not privileged there are ways of being privileged from your place of oppression and it's good to stop and recognize different ways and learn new things and create safe spaces.

For Miya, these spaces are important because they offer her and other members of the LGBTQ community at the University of the South the opportunity to have meaningful discussions in an environment that is not only welcoming but also one that is conducive to exploring ideas that benefit that particular community.

In addition to Miya, Leona also discussed how important it is to have safe spaces on campus. Different than safe spaces related to exploring sexual identity, Leona discussed the need for spaces that allow Black students on campus the opportunity to express the frustration they feel as students at a predominantly white institution. In order to capture this, Leona took a picture of a surveillance sign that she saw on campus. When discussing her reactions to the shooting of Trayvon Martin and the idea of constantly being under surveillance both on and off campus. Leona talked about how these types of occurrences produce fear and frustration among Blacks and how important it is to provide spaces to process these reactions:

We need to provide opportunities for young Black people to talk about these things. There aren't really avenues to talk about this in a safe way. I think we do need to talk about it because it's effecting you on that type of level....

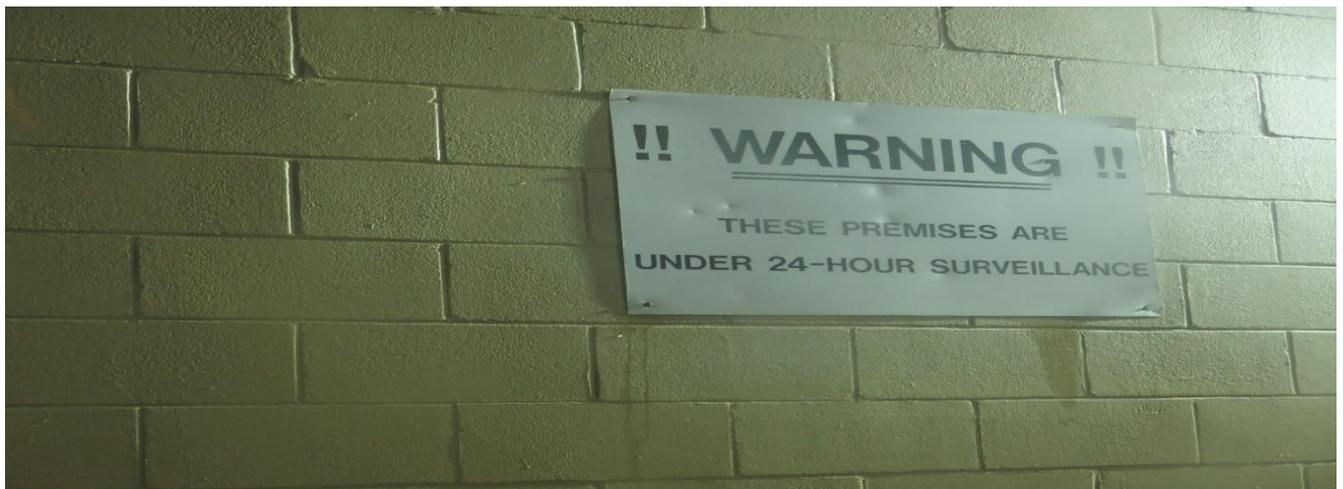


Figure 14: Under Surveillance Sign

In addition to discussing safe spaces on campus that allow marginalized individuals the opportunity to express themselves in a welcoming, non-judgmental environment, Miya also discussed the importance of having physical spaces on campus that allow students to step back from daily life and decompress. While the US campus is large and there are many public spaces on campus, Miya also discussed how important it is to have private spaces on campus for students. In the absence of these types of spaces, Miya discussed how she navigates this need by creating her own spaces. One of the pictures that she shared during our second session was from the inside of a bathroom stall. Below Miya describes why she included this photo:

For me, I get anxious a lot sometime so bathrooms have always just been my go to space if I'm not somewhere where I can just be by myself. It's the go to space when I need a breather for a minute. I'd like to be alone.... I feel like I don't really have a lot of those on campus either, just places where you can go and sit for a minute.



Figure 15: Inside of a Bathroom Stall

For Miya, private spaces on campus are essential to her daily life because they offer her a private, physical space that allows her to process her experiences.

For the women in the study, finding community and spaces on campus are important components of their daily lives and experiences. In the same way that the communities and spaces vary by participant, their significance also varies. For Leona, the communities that she has developed provide with a space where she feels cared for. For Alyssa, Nichole and Miya they represent spaces where they can pursue their academic goals while also socializing with friends and others that they have formed relationships with. Regardless of their meaning in the lives of these women, these spaces, and the lack thereof, are important defining features in their daily lives and experiences.

Analysis:

According to Collins (2000) it is necessary that members of marginalized groups have safe spaces to express themselves that fall outside dominant ideologies. For Collins, it is from these spaces that marginalized groups can empower themselves through self-definition:

Self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Instead, self is found in the context of family and community—as Paule Marshall describes it, ‘the ability to recognize one’s continuity with the larger community’ (Washington 1984, 159). By being accountable to others, African-American women develop more fully human, less objectified selves. (2000, p. 113)

For Collins and other Black women writers, “the issue of the journey from internalized oppression to the “free mind” of a self-defined womanist consciousness” (Collins, 2000, p. 112) is an important theme. This process of self-definition is instrumental to Black women’s experiences because it highlights the relationship between their expressions and oppression. Additionally, self-definition is important because it rejects widely accepted understandings of Black womanhood. Placing Black women at the center of the discussion and placing an emphasis

on self-definition is key to individual and group empowerment because it offers Black women the opportunity to push back against the type of stereotypical understandings of Black womanhood previously discussed.

When we think about the experiences of the women in this project, we can see how important these spaces are. While Collins speaks specifically about safe spaces and their importance to Black women, her ideas can be used to also discuss the need for community or communal spaces on college campuses. For example, Leona's path towards self-definition was based in large part on her need to connect with others. If we refer back to the section on social relationships we can see how Leona's difficulties forming relationships with others impacted her experiences and how they led her to seek out relationships that were instrumental in helping her find out who she is as a Black woman at the University of the South. For Leona, part of her journey towards self-definition includes a sense of feeling welcomed and cared about by others. Considering this, we begin to understand how important the relationships she formed with the Black employees that work in the dining hall are. As we can see from her interviews, these relationships are not just casual ones, they make up an important part of her daily life. In addition to feeling cared for by others, Leona's self-definition is also based on having the opportunity to share common experiences with other Black women on campus. In particular, Leona's participation in the various on-campus movements she was involved in was motivated by the racial incidents that she and other Black women experienced on the campus at the University of the South. It is through these common struggles and the ability to share them that Leona was able to "actualize her voice."

Like Leona, Alyssa discussed the importance of forming communities based on common experiences and interests. For Alyssa, her community consisted of members of her fraternity.

However, unlike Leona, Alyssa's community is comprised of a diverse group of men and women who gather on a regular basis at their fraternity house. In other words, their relationships are based on a common interest, their shared membership in their fraternity. Even though this community is more diverse and includes more than just Black women, Collins' understanding of the importance of these types of spaces can still be applied to discussing this particular group because it is instrumental in Alyssa's process of self-defining. For Alyssa, her decision to participate in these types of organizations and surround herself with a more diverse group of friends was a deliberate decision:

I know that I would have had a very different experience if I went to an HBCU. I know that I would've probably joined an NPHC organization. I know that I probably would have been part of the Black Student Union. I probably would have done a lot of things differently.

Having a diverse friend group and participating in organizations that are made up of a diverse group of individuals, are part of who Alyssa is as a Black woman at the University of the South.

Nichole and Miya also discussed different places around campus that are important to them. In Nichole's case, her community was made up of her friends. For Nichole, her friends and the time they spent at the library was useful not only for studying but also for socializing. Similarly, Miya discussed how her professor's office served as not only a location for studying but also for socializing. Additionally, Miya shared how her professor's office offered a space where she felt cared for. For both women, doing well in school was important and finding physical spaces on campus, though sometimes difficult, was important for both of them. Additionally, both women discussed the importance having friends or others on campus that they can form relationships with. Like Leona, this process of forming communities with others based on common interests and experiences was an important part of their process of self-definition.

According to Collins (2000), Black women's resistance is dependent on the presence of

spaces that allow Black women to speak freely:

While domination may be inevitable as a social fact, it is unlikely to be hegemonic as an ideology within social spaces where Black women speak freely. This realm of relatively safe discourse, however narrow, is a necessary condition for Black women's resistance. (p. 100)

For Miya, finding safe spaces on campus was an important aspect of her years at the university. As a woman who identifies as someone who is “hashtag not straight”, Miya shared how she has felt isolated and discussed the role that these spaces have had in her daily life:

...this is also providing opportunities for improving lives but the way that we can talk about these things and talk about them together and have more awareness of different people and different ways of being. Even when you're not privileged there are ways of being privileged from your place of oppression and it's good to stop and recognize different ways and learn new things and create safe spaces.

The creation of safe spaces is important to Miya because they allow her to not only explore her role at the university as a Black woman but also as a lesbian. As a member of two marginalized groups on campus, Miya understands the importance of not only finding places where she feels welcomed but also spaces where can she express herself freely.

As previously stated, undertaking a process of self-definition offers opportunities for individuals and groups to become empowered. As Black women who attend a predominantly white institution, many of the women shared their struggles in defining not only their position within the larger campus environment but also with figuring out who they are. For these women, finding spaces on campus, whether physical or non-physical, offered them opportunities to define themselves based on personal experiences. It is important to mention that while the process of self-definition can be applied to groups, the current section focused on the individual empowerment that occurred for the women studied. For example, in Leona's case, her process of self-definition occurred as a result of her forming meaningful relationship with others on

campus. From feeling cared for and accepted by others, to being able to discuss traumatic experiences that happened on campus, Leona was able to find her voice as a Black female student on campus which influenced her to participate in the various social justice movements on campus as well as serve as a source of inspiration for other Black women who may be experiencing the same thing. While Miya also discussed the importance of building communities and finding safe spaces on campus too, her process of self-definition was different than Leona's and this was due in large part to her needs and her standpoint as a Black lesbian on campus. The point here is that there is no step-by-step guide to self-definition and that each participant went about defining herself and her role at the university in different ways which is key to debunking the presence of a universal Black woman.

Sub-theme: Diversity

In its decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), the Supreme Court determined that diversity is an issue of great importance that justifies using race as part of the admission process of colleges and universities. According to the court, diversity in the student body advances the broad educational goals of institutions across the United States. The Supreme Court's understanding of the significance of diversity at institutions of higher education is based partly on research that has focused on exploring how diversity enhances students' learning outcomes. While some of this research focuses on legal cases related to race based admission, findings from additional research highlights the relationship between enrolling racially and ethnically diverse students and the educational goals of institutions.

Despite the use of policies that allow admission decisions to be made based on race, diversity at institutions of higher education continues to be an issue. Like other predominantly white institutions, the University of the South is no different. The issue of diversity on campus

was popular topic among the participants. Each woman addressed the topic in different ways. For example, some of the women focused on the campus as a whole and its lack of diversity. Other women focused on particular organizations such as the SGA and the Greek community and their lack of diversity.

The four years Leona spent at US were defined by the university's lack of diversity. As a student leader and activist, Leona is well known on and off campus for being one of the most vocal voices in favor of integrating the Pan-Hellenic sororities on campus. While she states that she personally had no interest whatsoever in joining an all-white sorority, she says that she was motivated to do because she did not think it was fair that other Black women were being denied bids to join.

One thing that really set me on a path of activism, I guess, is the sorority integration that we had. I was not interested in joining a Pan-Hellenic sorority, I kind of came in knowing that I wanted to an NPHC sorority. But the fact that Kennedy wasn't able to get into the sorority that she wanted to join although she had outstanding accomplishments really just rubbed me the wrong way and I was invited to be part of the movement and actually got to speaking during it. That experience really helped me to find my voice and to be comfortable with standing up for what I think which has led to another movement that I was a part of called the We Are Done movement which helped to result in the Intercultural Diversity Center. So, my experiences from where I was upset and crying and trying to reapply to different schools helped me to try and make this place better for students of color who might be going through that too.

Nichole also discussed her issues with Black women not being allowed to join Pan-Hellenic sororities. When asked about how Black women struggle at the University of the South, Nichole shared the following:

I would say the struggle is in the whole sorority atmosphere with the Pan-Hellenic sororities. You know there are African Americans who want to participate in that but there's a problem with that. It should be open to everyone. When they are accepted they are one of only, one out of a whole pledge class and the you're just a token Black girl on the video. I feel that's where they struggle, when they do have that one Black girl, they

use her as the token Black girl.

In addition to the lack of diversity in the Pan-Hellenic sororities, the lack of diversity in other on-campus organizations was discussed. For example, Brandy, an active member of SGA, discussed the lack of diversity in the SGA. When I first met Brandy her focus in terms of diversity on campus as a whole and SGA, was geared towards moving away from thinking about diversity in terms of Black and white. For example, when discussing her approach to diversifying the SGA Brandy focused a lot of her discussion on increasing the number of women representatives in SGA. Additionally, she talked a lot about finding ways to help members of other minority or ethnic groups become active in SGA:

I wish that we would admit and get more diversity on campus. I believe in diversity but not just diversity as Black and white and I think that's what a lot of people on this campus see and they're like 'oh, we're diversifying.' In the Senate there's one African-American undergrad Senator who is Black...that is me. There is one undergrad Senator, male who is Black and there are one of each gender for the grad school we don't have any LGBTQA represented, we don't have any Hispanics, we don't have any Middle Easterners, we don't have anyeven not diversity in race or ethnicity but in religion. We don't have Muslims represented.

Though Brandy didn't abandon these ideas all together, her stance changed a little after she was asked to take photos of her daily life and reflect on them. While Brandy initially focused on moving discussions about diversity away from Black versus white, Brandy discussed her frustration with the lack of Blacks in SGA:

I took this picture because it annoys the living daylights out of me that there are no Black people in this picture; there are no Black people in Senate. There are probably very few Black people in SGA, we're probably 2% maybe.... I can pretty much name off all the Black people in SGA, that's a problem too. And the Black people that are in SGA are pretty much the wealthier Black people or the well-connected African-Americans in the white society....



Figure 16: SGA Meeting

Closely related to the lack of diversity of on-campus organizations like SGA and the Pan-Hellenic sororities and fraternities, the lack of diversity in terms of the student body was discussed by a few of the women. For example, Brandy discussed the low percentage, roughly 12%, of Black students at US. Additionally, she discussed how the university needs to consider a new formula for accepting new students that focuses on creating a more diverse student population (see her preliminary interview).

A few of the other participants also discussed diversity related to the student body when they discussed their classes. For example, Neo discussed the lack of diversity in her classes and the impact it has had on her.

I think where we struggle is trying to figure out when to implement our voice. For instance, in my English class there are only 3 Black people in my class and we're all females and I don't speak up because I don't want...because it's a stigma of what comes out of mouth is not right, it might be ignorant.

Miya shared a similar sentiment when asked about how she thinks she is seen by others on campus:

I think that it's a weird space in either being really visible or sort of being invisible (laughs). Um because I feel, in some of my classes specifically because a lot of mine don't have that many other Black people like it's pretty often that I am the only Black person in the room, sometimes it feels like it's hyper visible and I feel like I have to present myself a certain way depending.

In addition to the lack of other Black students in their classes, many of the women discussed the impact that the lack of minority faculty members has had on their collegiate experiences. For example, Miya shared that in her time at US she has never had “a Black professor or professor of color at all...” Brandy also discussed the lack of Black faculty members when we met to discuss her photos:

Okay, this picture seems weird at first um but it's not really because if you can see kind of in the background it's very faint and the reason why I kind of took the picture is because I feel like as African-Americans are kind of faint in classrooms, like people kind of ignore you unless you make yourself known. In the background is a short black lady and that is my only African-American teacher that I've had in the accounting program at the University of the South...that's a problem. I don't think we have enough diverse teachers, if we go to a PWI we have white teachers, we're in class with white students, it's all you see. Somebody told me that it's like a white washed wall. We live in a white washed world. Until you made me do this project I never really thought about it, it was normal to me.



Figure 17: Brandy in Class

Neo also discussed the lack of diversity when it comes to faculty when asked what she would tell administrators if she had the chance to sit down and talk with them.

I would tell them to have a more diverse group of teachers. A lot of the teachers are either older, grad students, male and white...we do well when we see more people of our own. At least that's what I do. If I see a group of people that look more like me, then I do well because I'm like 'okay, they understand the struggle and there's a possibility they understand what I'm going through or what I will go through'.

While the issue of diversity was discussed from different standpoints in terms of the importance of racial and gender diversity, the lack of diversity has impacted the participants involved in various ways. In some instances the lack of diversity at UA has pointed out the flaws in society. For others, the lack of diversity, especially in the classroom, has led to some of the women less confident in participating in class discussions. And finally, the lack diversity related to the faculty has been problematic as well.

Analysis:

According to Collins (2000), "oppression describes any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the

resources of society” (p. 4). In the case of the University of the South, denying students the opportunity to participate in on-campus organizations like the Panhellenic sororities and SGA serve as a form of oppression. Traditionally, the “larger system of oppression works to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals and to protect elite White male interests and worldviews” (Collins, 2000, p. 5). However, under Black Feminist Thought, oppression, or an awareness of it, serves as an important element of empowerment. Collins (2000) stated that neither empowerment nor social justice can be achieved without some sense of what one is trying to change” (p. xi). If we look at particularly at the experiences of Brandy and Leona we can see how the inability to participate in certain on-campus organizations was instrumental in their commitment to social justice issues on campus. While Leona shared that she personally had no desire to join a NPHC sorority, she did say that she was bothered by the fact that friends of hers, who were well-qualified for candidacy, were denied the opportunity to pledge because they were Black. In Brandy’s case, the lack of diversity in SGA was problematic and led her to pursue various avenues for getting more non-white students involved in SGAs. As we can see from their experiences, Leona and Brandy were able to be empowered from the position of oppression because they recognized their oppression and found ways to overcome it.

In addition to issues related to on-campus organizations, there was a lot of discussion about the lack of diversity in the classroom. For the women involved in this project, the lack of other Black students in the classroom was a challenge. In the previous section we discussed the need for safe spaces on campus and as we can see from the stories shared in this section, classrooms at the University of the South, according to the participants, are not examples of these types of spaces. More often than anything, the classrooms at US represent unsafe spaces on campus that reaffirm the marginalized status of minority students. As unsafe spaces, the

classrooms at US, as a result of their lack of diversity, serve as spaces of oppression for Black women on campus. For example, Neo shared how she struggles to find her voice in the classroom because she is afraid of saying the wrong thing and being labeled as ignorant. Miya also discussed her personal difficulties within the classroom. By describing the campus as a “white washed wall”, Brandy acknowledges that Black students on campus are invisible or “faint” and can only be seen and heard when they make an effort to do so. And as the “only Black person in the room”, Miya discussed how the lack of other Black students in her classes have left her feeling vulnerable or “hyper-visible” and invisible at the same time. Different than the safe spaces previously discussed, the classrooms at the University of the South represent spaces of oppression and offer little, if any, opportunities for empowerment for Neo and Miya. In fact, they serve as spaces that silence the women and further marginalize them.

In addition to discussing the lack of other Black students in their classes, a few of the women also discussed the negative impact that having no Black professors has had on their daily lives and experiences. Miya shared how she has never had a Black professor in her three years at the university while Brandy acknowledged that she had only had one Black female professor. When discussing the lack of non-white faculty members on campus with a friend, Brandy shared how they felt that the university was like a “white washed wall.” For Miya and Brandy, the lack of non-white faculty members on the campus at US is further evidence of the lack of diversity across the university. Like the Black female students involved in this project, the non-white faculty members on campus find themselves occupying an “outsider-within” status that both grants them access to the university culture while relegating them to the margins of that very culture. In addition to Miya and Brandy, Neo also discussed the lack of diversity in the faculty at the university and discussed its impact on her personal experiences. According to Neo, the

majority of the teachers at the university are “male and white” which is problematic for minority students:

...we do well when we see more people of our own. At least that's what I do. If I see a group of people that look more like me, then I do well because I'm like ‘okay, they understand the struggle and there's a possibility they understand what I'm going through or what I will go through.

For Neo, having Black professors is important to her as a Black female student because she feels as if Black faculty members on campus could better relate to her and her peers. Additionally, Neo discussed how she personally performs better when she has Black teachers. The importance of non-white professors at the university level becomes clear when we consider these feelings shared by the participants. According to Pang and Gibson (2001), “Black educators are far more than physical role models, and they bring diverse family histories, value orientations, and experiences to students in the classroom, attributes often not found in textbooks or viewpoints often omitted” (p. 260-61). As living “texts”, Black professors at predominantly white universities offer students access to valuable life experiences that take into consideration Collins’ notion of interlocking oppressions. By bringing personal experiences related to racism, sexism and others forms of oppression, in addition to their personal strengths, non-white professors could potentially offer students spaces that are empowering and could help them gain a better understanding of the world around them (Freire, 1970; Wink, 2000) and ultimately change it.

Sub-theme: On-campus Resources and Support

Somewhat related to the sub-theme just discussed, many of the participants discussed on-campus resources and support. While these challenges may not be unique to Black women, they are discussed here because almost all of the participations shared how frustrated they are with the current level of on-campus resources and support offered at US. Additionally, some of the

participants discussed the sources of on-campus support that have been important in their experiences as Black women at a PWI.

According to Brandy, “it’s hard sometimes to have the courage to ask someone for help.” For Brandy, this due to the fact that sometimes Black women at US “...don’t have the resources or know who to go to for those resources. People don’t tell you about it. I don’t know if it’s a race thing...” Brandy also discussed how the resources that are available are not in convenient locations for the entire student body. When talking about the Student Help Center, Brandy stated:

People don’t actually go there. I’m working on getting them a new Location also. They’re on the north side of campus but what about the south side? Most students don’t want to walk from the north side to the south side because it’s hot, we live in the south. I think that’s a huge problem too...just having those resources in a convenient location for everyone and not just a particular set of students on campus.

Like Brandy, Alyssa and Kayla also discussed the challenges they faced with the lack of on-campus support they received, particularly after specific racially charged incidents on campus. While the full details of these incidents will be discussed later, both women talked about how they have dealt with these incidents on their own because they did not know who they could turn to. For example, Alyssa, when talking about various incidents that have happened to her on-campus, shared:

I’ve had things said to me on campus that I know I’m just supposed to deal with because there’s not a place for me to go to say ‘hey, this shouldn’t be happening. I shouldn’t have to deal with this. I shouldn’t have to be okay with them saying these types of things.’ And there’s not a space for that.

Kayla said that after a similar situation she considered leaving the university because she “didn’t know what to do” and she didn’t know where she could turn for help.

While Brandy, Alyssa and Kayla focused on incidents that occurred and how the lack of on-campus resources and support impacted them, Miya focused her discussion on this topic on

an on-campus resource that she feels has been important to her during her years at US. For Miya, this topic came up during her secondary interview. One of the pictures that Miya submitted as part of this project was a stack of brochures in the counseling office:

The next picture is just a picture of all the brochures in the counseling office just because I think it's important to think about mental health especially when you're thinking about college. I've gone to the counseling center before because I think it's useful event if you're just talking about your life.



Figure 18: Brochures in Counseling Office

For Miya, using the resources provided by the counseling center have provided her with a much needed space to take an inventory of your mental health. According to Miya, college is “not just about your grades and extra-curriculars but also about your health.”

In addition to the counseling center, Miya also discussed the support that she has received from some of her professors. While she admitted that sometimes she is frustrated by the fact that some of her professors assume she is okay, and does not need assistance, she also talked about

the importance of meeting with professors and how “it’s really fun just talking to them about my research and what I want to do.” She also mentioned one professor in particular: “...there’s one professor that I love and he’s great. We talked about politics and some other things a couple of times and it’s just been really interesting conversation.” Brandy also discussed the support that she has received from faculty in her department; however, Brandy also acknowledges that this is not something that everyone has:

I’ve had the opportunity to be pretty close with my Dean. I’m working on a project with him. Anytime I have a problem with a class, he’s so considerate. I know a lot of people don’t know who their Deans are. They don’t know their names, nothing.

She also described a similar relationship with her professors: “I’ve gotten really close with all of my professors over time so I will go into their office hours if I don’t understand something.”

Nichole also discussed the relationships that she had with the faculty in her department.

According to Nichole, “the faculty in the CS department might be the most amazing people.

They all made the classes enjoyable and I definitely appreciate all the knowledge I gained from them.”

While some of the women expressed frustrations with the lack of on-campus support and resources at US, others discussed the sources of support that have had a positive impact on their experiences. Despite whether or not they discussed examples of support they have benefited from on campus, all of the acknowledged that there is a problem when it comes on-campus support and resources. And again, it’s important to mention that these issues are not discussed in relation to this study because they are challenges specific to Black women only. They are mentioned here because of the fact that multiple participants used their different sessions to address this topic.

Analysis:

As we can see from this section and the previous ones, Black female students often times struggle on predominantly white campuses. In addition to challenges forming meaningful relationships with others, a lack of diversity on campus and issues related to finding safe spaces on campus, the women involved in this project also discussed their challenges related to on-campus support and resources. While a few of the women were able to find some spaces or places on campus that offered them support, the majority of the women found that the university culture is not properly designed to deal with their particular needs. While there are many possible explanations for the lack of resources or support, we can use Collins' (1986) notion of "outsider-within" to explore this concern of the Black women participants. In previous sections we discussed how the status of "outsider-within" has confined the Black women that participate in this study to the outskirts of the university and with the stories shared in this section we see the consequences of this marginalized position at the university. According to Collins (1986), "the oppression experienced by most Black women is shaped by their subordinate status in an array of either/or dualities" (p. 20). As "insiders" they have firsthand knowledge about the dominant culture of the university but their dual role as "outsiders" limits their access to the resources available to the members of that dominant group. For example, Brandy discussed how Black students in general struggle at the University of the South because they do not always know where to go on campus to get the support they need. Alyssa and Kayla shared this same sentiment when they discussed various racial incidents on campus. While the particulars of those incidents will be explored in greater deal in the next section, they are mentioned here because both women expressed their disappointment in not having on-campus resources or support to help them process the incidents. Beyond further highlighting the need for safe spaces on campus,

the stories shared by Brandy, Kayla and Alyssa in this section demonstrate how there are not adequate resources on campus to help Black women deal with the issues they face on a day-to-day basis. Although many of the women expressed frustration with the lack of resources and support, a few of the women provided a few examples of how they have felt supported on campus. The support from on-campus places like the counseling center and their academic departments are examples of the benefits of their “insider” status. While Brandy shared that many Black students at the University of the South do not know where to go for support, she and Miya and demonstrated that they not only know where to go but they know how to access these spaces. For example, both Brandy and Miya discussed the relationships that they have formed with faculty members in their respective departments. For both women, the relationships they have formed with the faculty members on campus have been beneficial to them in terms of their academic pursuits. Whether they are meeting with the faculty members to discuss research or working on projects with their faculty advisors, these relationships serve as prime examples of their status as “insiders” within the dominant campus environment.

Sub-theme: Racial Incidents

This section of the chapter will explore in more detail a few of the racially motivated incidents that happened on campus that have had a lasting impact on the women studied in this project. As previously mentioned, every effort was made to not repeat information included in other sections; however, some information may be repeated in this section to properly contextualize and recount these experiences.

While Leona credits her involvement with the integration of the Pan-Hellenic sororities as her introduction to being a student activist on campus, an incident that occurred during her first few weeks as a student at UA served as her introduction to the racism that sometimes occurs

on campus. As discussed how the campus environment and it affected her experiences, Leona shared the following story:

My freshman year I remember walking to go help set up for Quidditch on the Quad at the Rec center. I was leaving from Nott Hall going to the Rec, walking behind the old row fraternity houses. This was in the spring where they have the day party stuff going on, so people were inebriated. And I remember a truck of fraternity men pulling out of the house passing me on the street and yelling out 'Nigger' at me. It was broad daylight. I was just confused and kind of amused but more confused. I didn't know who to turn to, who to talk to about that and that really drove home the point to me that we need to make it more comfortable for our students of color on this campus because I know I'm not the only one. I actually found out that I wasn't the only one. I went to a forum and felt led to share that experience at the forum and many women came up to me afterwards telling me that they've had similar experiences.

Kayla described a similar event that took place a year later during her freshman year:

...And then that same night, we were walking trying to get somewhere else to go. There was this...I don't even know how old this boy was, old enough to know better. But, he, you know, we were getting on a bus trying to go somewhere, to another house, something of that nature and he was like...he proceeded to call me...he singled me out because, you know, I was trying to corral everyone...he singled me out and said you know, 'get out of our way, nigger bitch!' And, being a 19 year old girl at the University of the South, very brand new situations for me, just being at frat row, um, it just really caught me off guard and I didn't know what to do. And I knew I couldn't show any emotion at that moment in time. I got back to my room and I cried, and I cried and I was really so close to feeling like I want to go home because this isn't how you're supposed to treat people. And I was in a very post racial mindset at that time and that was one of the first really big things that happened to me where I realized you know, this isn't what I thought it was. And I think that was... it was, it kind of set everything in motion for me in terms of how I live my life now.

Brandy also shared a similar story when attending a fraternity party.

...I was in a fraternity party and I was with like, one group of friends and I had another group of friends. And this, I guess Caucasian kid said 'What are all these (pauses)...' [can I use the word, the N word?] [S.R.T: Mm-hmm, yeah go for it.]...he was like, 'What are all these niggers doing here in our party?' I didn't hear it, my friends heard and they told me and they were like 'hey, this kid just said this.'

Miya also discussed being in a similar situation and discussed how frat row makes her “uncomfortable.”

...there’s a time when I first got here and I didn’t know yet that you should probably stay away from frat row. There was a group of us and we’re all Black women and we went out to party on frat row and it was just sort of uncomfortable because it was a really white space and then I remember on the way back...I don’t remember what was said but I remember this guy in his truck decided to yell something on his way out and it was just really uncomfortable. I mean, frat row makes me uncomfortable anyway but....so that was one experience.

It is important to point out that all of the incidents recounted here are separate events despite their similar nature. While the incidents here are important because they provide detailed examples of the types of incidents Black women encounter at PWIS, they are included here in such detail because they all served as sources of motivation for the women involved to become involved in various on-campus organizations and protests.

Analysis:

While the racial incidents in this section have been mentioned previously, they were given their own section because they best represent the struggles that Black women at the University of the South face. For the Black women involved in this project, these incidents are important for a variety of reasons. First, these incidents serve as a reminder of the university’s racist past. Although the university is no longer the segregated institution it once was, racism still exists on campus. From the incidents described above to the refusal to accept Blacks as members of NPHC organizations on campus, these incidents provide examples of the institutionalized racism that pervades the university environment. Second, these incidents further illustrate how their position as “outsiders-within” make them susceptible to the racially motivated violence that sometimes occurs. As we have previously discussed, their status as “insiders” gives them access

to the university at large. However, their status as “outsiders” all but diminishes this access and does not protect them from the types of incidents described in this part of the chapter. Third, and finally, these racial incidents are important because they served as a catalyst to help the women affect change on campus. As previously stated, a key element of Black Feminist Thought is offering opportunities for empowerment from places of oppression. Although these incidents were intended to devalue the women, the participants used them as motivation to change the campus environment.

Summary:

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the results and findings of the data collected for this project. Through an analysis of information collected from a preliminary interview which collected background information, a secondary interview which focused on discussing the images the women took, and a final session to record personal narratives, the current chapter identified themes that are important to the daily lives and experiences of the participants. From an exploration of their personal relationships to the impact that externally held and imposed stereotypes have on their lives, the present section uses various elements of Black Feminist Thought to analyze and discuss their experiences. Despite the fact that there are core themes of Black Feminist Thought, Black women respond to them in different ways. In other words, the differences among Black women produce different experiences which impact how Black women respond to the tenets central to Black Feminist Thought. As we have seen from the discussions with the women who participated in this study, the responses to these core themes are as different as the women themselves.

While Black women, both inside and outside the university, experience similar challenges, the present study debunks the presence of a universal Black woman. Additionally,

the current section shows the different ways that the women involved in this study responded to the various challenges they face as Black female students at the University of the South. In addition to challenging the presence of a universal Black woman, the current chapter highlights the importance of considering the ways that markers of difference like class, age and sexual orientation intersect to produce unique standpoints that are instrumental in the development of Black Feminist Thought. In the next chapter, the discussion about the creation of an “oppositional Black aesthetic” continues along with my personal observations about the participants. Additionally, a summary of the project along with a few implications of this research will be discussed. Finally, a few suggestions for future research projects are offered.

CHAPTER V DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Discussion:

The purpose of this project was to engage Black female students that attend the University of the South in the creation of an “oppositional Black aesthetic” which offered the women an appropriate space for adequately exploring their daily lives and experiences. Informed by the tenets of Black Feminist Thought, the present study used photography and storytelling to help the participants in the study (re)present themselves on their own terms and in their own words. Through the use of a modified photo voice approach, this study served as a response to bell hook’s call for exploring the relationship between representation and photography. By challenging commonly accepted stereotypes about Black womanhood, the participants in this study demonstrated that while Black women share common experiences, there is no such thing as a universal Black woman. In other words, the participants in this project demonstrated the importance of pushing back against stereotypes that have historically been used in order to justify the Black woman’s subordination.

As previously mentioned, representation or “control over images” (bell hooks, 1995b, p. 59) continues to represent a site of struggle for marginalized groups. And as we have seen from this project, the need for the creation of counterhegemonic images and stories is important in undermining the problematic representations of Black womanhood that plague the Black women involved in this project. In order to properly contextualize the importance of this type of work, we have to understand the role that representation plays in maintaining and promulgating white

supremacy. Historically, the issue of representation took a backseat to issues like equal access and segregation (see bell hooks, 1995b). In his essay *White Out* (1992), Roger Wilkins wrote the following:

In our naiveté, we believed that the power to segregate was the greatest power that had been wielded against us. It turned out the our expectations were quite wrong. The greatest power turned out to be what it had always been: the power to define reality where blacks are concerned and to manage perceptions and therefore arrange politics and culture to reinforce those definitions... (p. 149)

In other words, representation or how others perceived Blacks was not an important issue for Blacks during their quest for equal rights and the end of segregation. However, despite the fact that issues related to representation have been ignored to some extent, writers like bell hooks, Collins and Lourde, just to name a few, have discussed the importance of bringing the issues surrounding representation to the foreground in order to highlight the importance of producing images that “subvert the status quo” (bell hooks, 1995b, p. 58).

Although the Black aesthetics movement described in Chapter I never fully materialized, the present study demonstrates the need for exploring how aesthetic practices influence how marginalized groups, particularly Black women, create images and make sense of their lives and experiences. By offering Black women at the University of the South the opportunity to find creative ways to (re)present their lives through photography and storytelling, the present study undermines the essentialist nature of the failed Black aesthetics movement and demonstrates the importance of accounting for the multiple experiences faced by the Black women that participated in this project. In their creation of an “oppositional Black aesthetic” that combines photography and storytelling, the participants in this project answered bell hooks’ call to create images that “disrupt and subvert” (1992, p. 7) hegemonic representations of Blackness while at

the same time using them to “provoke and engage” (1992, p. 7) others in order to further develop revolutionary theories that focus on the relationship between representation and domination.

While the photographs and personal narratives shared in the previous chapter demonstrate the importance of and the possibility for creating spaces for an “oppositional Black aesthetic”, the data collected also highlight the various challenges associated with this task. For example, one of the difficulties in creating counterhegemonic images evident from the data collected deals with the unintended consequence of reinforcing negative stereotypes. Although my intention is not to minimize or negate their experiences, I would be remiss not to critically discuss the participants and the narratives and photographs they shared during our time together.

As we saw earlier, stereotypical representations of Black women have historically plagued them and continue to do so. While the names associated with these stereotypes have changed over time, they continue to have a very real, very material impact on the women upon which they are imposed, For example, Collins’ historical image of the Jezebel currently manifests itself differently and instead of being labeled a Jezebel, today’s Black woman would instead be referred to as a THOT which stands for “that ho over there.” Although it is not my intention to explore how these “controlling images” manifest themselves in today’s society, the relationship between Collins’ Jezebel and hip hop’s THOT is important to mention because, despite the advancements that Black women have made in challenging these stereotypes, they are still very much alive today and they function in the same way, to devalue Black women, explain their exploitation and to reinforce white supremacist ideals. Considering this, it seems that producing images and retelling stories that shatter these stereotypes would be an easy task however, that is not always the case.

Although the women involved in this project did produce narratives and images that can be used to challenge these stereotypes, many of the representations produced in some ways reinforce them. In order to better understand this, the theory of the politics of respectability is helpful in understanding how the women involved in this study not only portrayed themselves but also how they present themselves to others. Writing in order to explore the experiences of Black women, Black feminist writers have highlighted the various challenges Black women have faced when it comes to navigating the intersecting oppressions they encounter on a daily basis. Of the many possible responses to these challenges faced by Black women, respectability politics is one strategy of many used by Black women to overcome their marginalized position within society. With the intention of establishing themselves as “respectable” citizens, their attempts at respectability “entailed the privileging of bourgeois, white, patriarchal and heteronormative ideals and aspiration” (Chepp, 2015, p. 208). Considered to be a form of “uplift” politics, this notion of respectability is a strategy that has been used by many Black women to improve their situation. However, as seen from the participants’ experiences discussed previously, adopting politics of respectability has produced unintended consequences. First, adopting politics of respectability, although lauded for its ability to be inclusive by offering members of marginalized populations access to the dominant culture, it can also serve as a way to silence them. For example, Neo shared how she often times does not speak in class out of a fear of being labeled ignorant. While she sees her decision to do so as a way of protecting herself from others, she fails to see how this plays into the notion of respectability politics by silencing her. In other words, instead of saying the wrong thing out of a fear of being judged by her white professors and classmates, she instead chooses to be silent in order to be acceptable. Second, respectability politics has resulted in dividing members of the Black community. As previously discussed,

failure to adhere to the somewhat rigid rules about what is considered “respectable” behavior combined with division along economic lines has proven to be divisive. By creating an “us” versus “them” dichotomy, certain members of the Black community are further pushed to the margins and silenced. Ultimately the divisive nature of these politics results in the belief that certain Black people are worthy to be respected while others are not. Brandy’s comments about how Black women are seen on campus serves as an example of this. During our sessions together, Brandy discussed how she has been privileged to not have to deal with being labeled according to the negative, stereotypical representations imposed upon other Black women at the University of the South. For her, this is attributed to her being able to prove herself to others by setting herself apart from these other Black women on campus. In other words, Brandy sets herself apart from her “ratchet” counterparts through the way she behaves. Kayla provides us with another opportunity to explore how the politics related to respectability function. Like Brandy, Kayla discussed how she felt that she was “not like those other Black people” when she first came to the university. Similar to Brandy’s comment, this assertion illustrates how Black women have been led to believe that in order to fit in or be accepted by others, or more particularly their white counterparts, they must be respectable and different from other Blacks. Third, respectability politics dehumanizes Black women by comparing them to white women. Under politics of respectability, white women represent the proverbial yardstick by which other women are measured (Collins, 1990, p. 176). From the appropriation of the Black woman’s body to establishing unattainable ideals related to beauty, this has resulted in Black women having to make tough decisions about how they present themselves to others in terms of appearance as exemplified in the following comment by Alyssa:

I would have to say the campus culture has affected me even probably even to the way I dress necessarily. I wear a lot more school gear than

I probably would if I went to somewhere else. I wear a lot more leggings and t-shirts to class because you kind of blend in that way.

While Alyssa attributes this to the campus environment, I would have to take it a step further and argue that this is due to the politics of respectability. For Alyssa, dressing in a manner similar to that of the white women on campus offers her the opportunity to “blend in” and ultimately be accepted. Though very different, all of the examples discussed here show the danger of buying into this idea of politics of respectability and highlight its material effects on Black women. Additionally, these examples highlight the power associated with respectability politics. Like other ideals enforced upon marginalized groups, those associated with being “respectable” are imposed upon Black women whether they recognize them or not. In other words, regardless of whether or not Black women buy into this notion of respectability, they are constantly being judged by those standards.

(Re)presenting Ourselves: Black Women, Anti-essentialism, Post-Structuralism and the “Oppositional Black Aesthetic”:

Despite the challenges associated with creating an “oppositional Black aesthetic”, the women involved in this project used their personal narratives and photographs to (re)present themselves and their daily experiences using their own words and on their own terms. In addition to offering the women involved in the present study a critical space for exploring their personal experiences, this project highlights the presence of a plurality of experiences among Black women. In other words, it demonstrates how essentialist understandings of Black womanhood should not only be questioned but replaced all together. From its inception, one of the shortcomings of prior attempts at establishing a Black aesthetic was its tendency to essentialize the Black experience. Although the writers, artists and musicians associated with these movements intended to produce representations of Black life worlds that challenged those

created by the dominant society, they ultimately were unable to do so. In the first place, they were unable to overcome the influence that the dominant society had on aesthetic practices. In other words, although they attempted to create their own understanding of how aesthetic practices can be linked to representation, they failed to completely rid themselves of the dominant society's influence which, in many cases, resulted in reinforcing the very stereotypical representations they intended to undermine. Secondly, when they were able to move beyond the influence of the dominant society, they were left with essentialist representations of what it means to be black. The presence of an essentialized understanding of Blackness proved to be difficult because it alienated and further marginalized certain members of the Black community—members that fall outside the prescribed understanding of what it means to be Black.

The present study, through its emphasis on personal narratives and participatory photography, highlights the importance of creating an “oppositional Black aesthetic” that challenges essentialism. In looking at the experiences shared by the women involved in this project, the plurality of their experiences demonstrates that Black women do not represent a monolith and that “while living as Black women may produce certain commonalities of outlook, the diversity of class, region, age and sexual orientation shaping individual Black women's lives has resulted in different expressions of these common themes (Collins, 1986, p. S16). For example, Nichole made it very clear from the beginning of the project that her intention in participating in this study was to “represent the university in the most positive light as possible.” Unlike the other women involved in this project, Nichole shared that she never, in her four years at the university, was discriminated against and never had to deal with the type of racist incidents the other women described during our sessions together. In fact, Nichole made a point to discuss

the diversity on campus and how happy she was for the opportunity to attend the university. Additionally, Brandy, in relating her experiences at the university in the beginning, chose to focus on the lack of diversity at US while pointing out that it went beyond race. In other words, while she indicated that US has a diversity problem, she chose not to discuss it within terms of Black and white. And if we look at Brandy and Alyssa's sessions, we can see that even though they mentioned how others see them and how their perceptions of them are usually negative and based primarily on their race, they have been able to overcome this as a result of the personal relationships they have been able to cultivate with their non-white peers. Kayla and Leona's experiences were very different than those shared by Nichole, Brandy and Alyssa. As a Black women who have experienced the racism that exists on campus firsthand, Kayla and Leona's understanding of who they are cannot be disentangled from the racist incidents they experienced. For example, both women discussed how the preconceived notions they themselves had prior to attending the University of the South changed dramatically after the racial incidents. Additionally, Neo spent a lot of time discussing how she is trying to adapt to her new environment and figure out her place at the university. Further, Miya's experiences at the university have not only been impacted by the racism she has experienced on campus but also by her sexuality. As a Black lesbian, Miya's experiences are very different from the other women involved in this project.

Despite the fact that the issues discussed in this section highlight some of the difficulties associated with creating an "oppositional Black aesthetic" at a PWI, the study as a whole sheds light on the possibilities that this type of project presents to those involved. In other words, the present study provides a good starting point for engaging Black women in the process of creating an "oppositional Black aesthetic" that promotes alternative ways of thinking about Black

womanhood. In the sections that follow, I will provide a summary of the project, followed by a few important implications and finally an overview of future areas of research all of which are essential to further explaining the importance of these types of projects.

Summary of the Findings and Implications for Practice:

The present study sheds light on the importance of conducting empirical research that focuses on Black women who attend PWIs. Although Black women have made tremendous strides in earning college degrees, the present study explored the various struggles that Black women face as students at PWIs. Considering the information collected in this study, there are a variety of implications for institutions of higher education, specifically PWIs, to consider.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Black women that attend PWIs often times have a hard time establishing and maintaining relationships with non-Black peers and faculty members on campus. While there are many possible explanations for this, a lack of common interests and experiences appeared to be the most common explanation. Additionally, problems related to forming relationships with other Black students was explored. While the majority of the women in this study shared that they were successful in establishing personal relationships with other Black students, this was not the experience for all of them. In addition to challenges related to the relationships they formed with others, another disadvantage explored in this study focused on the role that stereotypes play in the experiences of Black women at the University of the South. Through the use of Collins' (2000) theory on "controlling images", this dissertation demonstrates how these "controlling images", though historical, still negatively impact Black women in today's society. Imposed on Black women and created in order to maintain their marginalized status, these "controlling images" not only impact how others see Black women but also impact

how they, as Black women, view themselves and their role not only at the university but also in society.

Another disadvantage identified focused on the role that the development of community and location of safe spaces on campus plays in the lives of Black women. As discovered in this project, Black women have a strong sense of community that pushes them to form relationships with others based either on common interests and/or experiences. Additionally, this study highlighted the importance of identifying safe spaces on campus that allow Black women to speak freely in order become empowered from their place of oppression. A lack of diversity in terms of the student body and faculty were also found to be disadvantages faced by Black women at the University of the South. From feelings of being invisible to those of being hyper-visible, the women in this project explored how this lack of diversity has negatively impacted the women in the project. Another disadvantaged discovered dealt with the lack of on-campus resources and support Black women have to face at the university. Along with the other disadvantages discussed, the lack of resources and support at the university serve as further evidence of the fact that the campus culture is not designed to need the specific needs of minority students or in particular, Black female students. While it is not discussed necessarily as a disadvantage, the occurrence of racial incidents on campus serve as a reminder of the university's problematic past and its impact on the current campus environment.

Despite the fact that universities historically have been considered as institutions that provide opportunities for upward mobility, schools like the University of the South reinforce the marginalization that minority groups suffer in society. According to Zamani (2003) "the American system of education has been a microcosm of the larger society, reflecting and reinforcing its strengths and flaws" (p. 7). However, despite their role in maintaining the

marginalized status of particular groups, PWIs like the University of the South provide opportunities for exploring the structural disadvantages that Black women face, both inside and outside the confines of the university. Considering this, an important implication for this research deals with the fact that universities, although they are considered separate institutions, reinforce the ideologies dominant in society.

Another implication of this research focuses on the importance of offering Black women opportunities to self-define which leads to empowerment. By challenging the stereotypes that inform Black womanhood, the present study demonstrates the importance of producing counter-images and stories that can be used to more adequately explore the lives of Black women both inside and outside the university. A key theme of Black Feminist Thought, the process of self-definition “involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood” (Collins, 1986, p. S16). Considering this, it is important to offer Black women the opportunity to define themselves in order to not only challenge these stereotypical images but also to prevent them from becoming “willing participants in [their] own oppression” (Collins, 1990, p. 99).

Another important implication for this research deals with the importance of considering standpoint theory when exploring the experiences of Black women. For example, Collins’ (1986) notion of “outsider-within” explores the social and psychological conflicts that Black women experience as a result of having to negotiate their racial identity within the context of white privilege. Originally created by “mainstream” feminists to discuss the differences between the knowledge and viewpoints of men and women, Black Feminist standpoint theory promotes the importance of not only exploring gender differences but also differences related to race and class. Based on the creation of knowledge that is created as a result of one’s social position,

standpoint theory that focuses on Black female college students at PWIs offers a space for exploring how challenges like the campus environment and incidents of racism and sexism negatively impact not only their daily lives but how they see themselves as Black women.

And the final implication of this research deals with the importance of challenging the presence of a universal Black woman. While the collective experiences of the Black women were an important part of this project, their individual experiences proved that an essentialist understanding of Black womanhood is not only problematic but fails to take into consideration how markers of difference such as race, class and sexual orientation work together to create unique experiences for Black women. According to Grillo (2013), “race and class can never just be ‘subtracted’ because they are in ways inextricable from gender” (p. 19). Additionally, markers such as sexual orientation have to be considered. Taking these elements into consideration when exploring the lives of Black women is important in dismantling essentialist notions of Black womanhood that “assumes that the experience[s] of being a member of the group under discussion is a stable one, one with a clear meaning, a meaning constant through time, space, and different historical, social, political and personal contexts” (Grillo, 2013, p. 19).

Recommendations for Research:

Despite the number of studies related to Black students who attend PWIs, there is a need for in-depth scholarly work that focuses specifically on the experiences of Black women that attend PWIs. As previously mentioned, current research has discussed the various advantages that Black students as a whole face but they have failed to adequately differentiate between the experiences of Black men and Black women at the university level. Considering this, the present study maintains that research that focuses solely on Black women at PWIs needs to take place in order to help policymakers at these institutions better meet the needs of this particular group of

students. Additionally, using the data collected during the various phases of the project, other areas for possible research were identified. For example, research that focuses on how the role that Black women's identity plays in their college success should be explored. In order to do this, research that offers Black women creative ways to critically explore their identities should be done. This type of research is important for two reasons. First, it would offer spaces for Black women to not only discuss their experiences but also gives them the chance to explore these experiences within the context of white privilege. Second, this type of research would offer researchers the chance to analyze and possibly dismantle existing structures and policies that negatively impact the identity formation process of Black women at PWIs.

Another area of future research based on this project deals with the need for programs and other on-campus resources that deal with the specific needs of Black women at PWIs. For example, offering Black women physical and non-physical spaces on campus where they feel supported or feel free to express themselves without fear of judgement, are important and future research should be geared towards understanding the importance of these types of spaces as well as figuring out the best ways to develop them. In particular, research that focuses on the role that the markers of difference discussed in this project should be considered when developing these programs. By making a concerted effort to explore these differences, colleges and universities could potentially decrease the anxiety faced by Black women at PWIs.

Another important area of research based on this study deals with the cultural competency of the student body and faculty members at PWIs. As we have seen from this project, understandings of Black womanhood based on historical representations of Black women continue to have negative effects on Black women including how non-Blacks perceive, engage with and support Black women at PWIs. Despite the widely accepted presence of the

“strong Black woman”, this study has indicated how this lack of cultural competency not only impacts the students in terms of how others see Black women but also in how they see themselves in relation to the university (and society) as a whole.

Additionally, the present study highlights the importance of conducting research at PWIs that help Black female students critically think about their daily lives and experiences. While all of the women knew that they faced obstacles at the University of the South prior to their participation in this project, many of the women discussed how the project encouraged them to take a more critical look at their lives. In particular, it forced them to look at the role that photos and social media have on their daily lives. For example, when discussing how this project compared to how they currently use social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, tumblr, Instagram and Snapchat, a few of the women shared how this project forced to think critically about the types of pictures they took and their purpose:

I'm taking pictures that describe my life so you can see it through my eyes. In ways, it was different because I'm actively thinking about what picture I'm taking and why I'm taking it and why I feel this needs to be shared vs. "Oh, this is cute. This is cute. I might get fifteen likes on this picture or something like that." This wasn't for likes, this wasn't for sassy comments between me and my friends. I feel that this was... That's the way this photo project was totally different. I'm actively thinking about, "Okay, why am I taking this picture? Why does she need to see this picture? She doesn't need to see that. Why does she not need to see that?" –Alexis

I had to think more deeply and definitely about the pictures I was taking. Um I probably wouldn't have posted some of those on social media just because like....and honestly I wouldn't have had a caption for them. Um people don't want to read the pictures that you're taking that actually have meaning behind them....um, they'd be like that's weird, what are you doing like she's gonna off the walls. Uh, that's yeah. It really made me think about it, yeah. -Brandy

I had a reason for taking these pictures, I had to think about, "Why am I taking this photo and why is it important to my particular goal? Each of these photos has a particular story behind it which is different from the usual kinds of pictures that I take. -Kayla

...it is the first time I've done it in a reflective way um so this is like the first time I've felt like I've reflectively taken pictures of things and how it's reflected on my experiences... Um but yeah, this is the first time I've reflectively used digital media. –Leona

Conclusion:

Although current statistics show, as previously mentioned, that Black students' attendance at colleges and universities across the campus have increased, much work still needs to be done. In particular, the educational opportunities of Black women should be a priority to policymakers at all levels of the educational system and this is evident when we consider current initiatives like that of the White House Council on Women and Girls (2015) whose purpose is to advance the educational equity of women and girls of color. While initiatives like this one have been designed to bring attention to the educational inequalities that Black women and girls face, we must not only concern ourselves with getting these women in school, particularly universities, there needs to be some discussion about how to best support this particular group of women once they have arrived at various institutions of education. In order to identify ways to support Black women and girls in their educational pursuits, it is important to gain a better understanding of their daily lives and experiences.

The creation of a space for an “oppositional Black aesthetic” is useful for exploring the lived experiences of Black female students that attend PWIs. In order to create this space, the present study focused on the use of multi-modal ways of creating agentive identities through the use of a modified photovoice approach which focused on allowing participants to take photographs and prepare personal narratives that were used to explore their experiences. By engaging Black female students in the creation of an “oppositional Black aesthetic”, the present study offered the Black female students the opportunity to not only create counterhegemonic images but also tell their own stories, in their own words. Through the use of Black Feminist

Thought, the present study also demonstrated the importance of considering the collective and individual experiences of Black women in order to identify ways to address the challenges of this particular group of women. The study also pointed out the importance of facilitating Black women in the process of self-definition which serves to empower Black women that attend universities throughout the country.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Application

Sierra R. Turner

Sections of the IRB Application

Purpose, Objectives, Design

1. Research on Black students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) indicates that Black students experience difficulty in social and academic integration. While universities across the United States have created programs and services to address the needs of Black college students (Coker, 2003; Rosales & Person, 2003), researchers have found that traditional higher education institutions still remain unsupportive of Black college students, particularly female students (Coker, 2003; Downing, 2005; Howard-Hamilton, 2004; Levey, Blanco, & Jones, 1998).
2. The focus of this study is to use photovoice (a method that allows participants to define for themselves what is important using photographs taken by them and not others) as a means of exploring and documenting the lives and experiences of Black female college students at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the South.
3. The findings of this study will provide university administrators, faculty members and staff with a rich, contextual understanding of the experiences of Black college-aged female students.

Study Procedures

1. After participants have been identified, each student will participate in a preliminary, individual interview either on-line (via Skype) or at a place chosen by the participant. In this preliminary interview we will explore their experiences as Black female students at a PWI. At the conclusion of the preliminary interview, each participant will be trained (using the instructions provided by the manufacturer of the camera) on how to use the camera which will be provided by the researcher. The preliminary interview and camera training session will take anywhere between one to two hours; actual time for this session will vary based on the amount of information shared by participants and the amount of time needed to train them on how to use the camera.
2. After the preliminary interview, students will be given a week to take photos of their daily lives. Little guidance will be given as to what they should take pictures of. However, each participant will be asked to spend some time taking photographs that can be used to address the following prompts:
 - a. Take photos that visually represent how you locate yourself in the physical spaces at the university.
 - b. Take photos that show how you visually (re)present yourself socially and culturally at the university.

3. Once participants have finished taking photos, a follow-up interview will be conducted to discuss and contextualize the photographs. The follow-up interview will take anywhere between one to two hours; actual time will vary based on the amount of information shared by participants. Additionally, participants will be trained on how to use a digital voice recorder which will be used in the next step.
4. Once they have taken their photographs, each participant will be asked to use the digital voice recorders provided by the researcher to record either a personal narrative or story that can be used to either discuss the process itself of taking the photographs or provide narration for the photographs they took. Participants will be allowed one week to complete this part of the process.
5. Deception will not be used in this study.

Study Background

In his research with marginalized and oppressed groups, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire discussed the importance of creating spaces for marginalized groups to visualize the problems they face on a daily basis. This was important because it allowed members of these groups to use their works "as a basis to stimulate collective introspection, discussion, and action" (p. 212). According to Freire in his text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), most educational initiatives fail because they are designed by administrators, staff and other personnel based on their understanding of the world. In other words, these initiatives fail because they rarely take into account the lives and experiences of those the programs are designed to help.

Through the use of photovoice, the current study hopes to shed much needed light on the experiences of Black female students at a PWI in the South. Photovoice offers participants an opportunity to tell their stories--stories that have previously been rejected and/or overlooked (Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006; Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang, Burris & Xiang, 1996). Additionally, this process will offer participants a space for reflection and discussion of the issues that they must face on a daily basis (Lykes, 1997; Wang, 2003).

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Subject Population

1. For the purposes of this project, 5-10 subjects will be used depending on the number of volunteers recruited.
2. Participants will be undergraduate students from the University of Alabama. The students chosen for this project will be used because the purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of a particular group of students at a PWI.
3. In order to participate, participants must meet the following criteria:
 - a. be a Black female, degree-seeking undergraduate, AND
 - b. be between the ages 18-23, AND
 - c. have completed at least one semester of undergraduate coursework
4. While the number of participants will vary based on interest, certain criteria must be met in order to take part in this study. All of the participants selected for this study will be

female, undergraduate students (between the ages 18-23) who have completed at least one semester of coursework.

Subject Recruitment Methods

1. Recruitment will take place in the following phases:
 - a. Flyers will be put up in central locations across campus.
 - b. Emails will be sent out to anyone that expresses an interest in participating in the project based on the flyers.
 - c. Additionally, emails will be sent out to other students that meet the project requirements based on recommendations of other students and/or faculty/staff on campus (snowball sampling).
2. Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Risks

1. Participants will not be exposed to the possibility of physical harm by taking part in this study.
2. The study may have the following risk: There is minimal risk if you are involved in this study.
3. If participants have had a difficult experience that comes out during the phases listed previously, they may experience heightened anxiety, stress or sadness when sharing their experiences during the individual interviews. If this occurs, they will be given time to collect themselves before continuing, if they desire to do so.
4. Participants may lessen these risks by not participating in the study, by refusing to answer a particular question, or by not sharing things they find to be sad or stressful.
5. Participants will not be exposed to the possibility of political harm by taking part in this study.
6. Participants will not be exposed to the possibility of financial harm by taking part in this study.
7. While all information being collected will be kept confidential and anonymous, there is minimum risk to no risk that others will be able to figure out who the participants are which may present some, if any, harm to their social well-being.
8. If on-campus participants inquire about mental health services, the primary investigator will refer them to campus counselors which are available.

Benefits

1. The study may have the following benefit: While there are no direct benefits to those participating in this study, they may find it encouraging that the research may provide current educators and researchers with useful information that can be used to help them better understand the experiences of Black college-aged female students. Their participation in this study provides them with the opportunity to share their experiences in a way that can lead to policy changes and program changes that can provide for a more inclusive environment for all students at the university level.

Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality

1. For research related purposes, the interviewer would like to record basis biographical information including the race, gender, age, academic major/minor and memberships with any on-campus organizations of all participants. In order to protect this information, pseudonyms chosen by participants will be used.
2. Additionally, all information will stored in a secure location at the personal residence of the primary investigator. Audio-taped interviews will also be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.
3. Also, please note that while information gathered during this study may be published, the identity of each participant will be kept strictly confidential. However, in some instances the researcher may wish to use a direct quote from participants. Considering this, participants will be able to decide if the researcher can quote them at all and if they prefer their real name or pseudonym be used when they complete the permission to quote section of the Informed Consent form.
4. The transcripts of interviews will have any identifiable information removed. All data will be assigned a number and kept together in order to separate it from data collected from other participants.

Informed Consent

1. The primary research, Sierra R. Turner, and the secondary researcher, Dr. Natalie Adams.
2. Consent is being obtained via a written form that must be read in its entirety and signed by each participant at the beginning of the preliminary interview.
3. Once participants have had the chance to review the consent form, I will give the opportunity to ask any questions they may have to make sure they completely understand the process.
4. Students doing face-to-face preliminary interviews will be given the consent forms at the beginning of the preliminary interview and asked to sign it after they have read it and asked questions.

5. Students doing online preliminary interviews will be emailed the form prior to the preliminary interview and will be asked to email the signed form to the primary researcher the day before their preliminary interview.
6. Once participants have had the chance to review the consent form, I will give them the opportunity to ask any questions they may have to make sure they completely understand the process.

APPENDIX B: IRB Certification

January 11, 2016

Sierra Turner
College of Education
The University of Alabama
Box 870229

Re: IRB # 16-OR-011, "(Re)Presenting Ourselves: Creating an Oppositional Black Aesthetic at a Predominantly White Institution: A Photovoice Project"

Dear Ms. Turner:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on January 7, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent form and recruitment flyer.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Stuart Usdan, Ph.D.
Chair, Non-Medical IRB
The University of Alabama

APPENDIX C: Research Flyer

RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Black Female Students (Undergraduate Level) at the University of Alabama



Are you a Black female student at the University of Alabama?

Are you interested in sharing your experiences as a Black female student at the University of Alabama with others through the use of photography?

If so, we should talk!

My name is Sierra R. Turner and I am a graduate student in the Educational Leadership Program with a Concentration in Social and Cultural Foundations in Education at the University of Alabama. At this time, I am conducting a study entitled *(Re)presenting Ourselves: Creating an “Oppositional Black Aesthetic” at a Predominantly White Institution: A Photovoice Project* which focuses on using photography to document and explore the lives and experiences of Black female students at the University of Alabama.

Who can participate:

In order to participate, the students for this study must meet certain criteria. Each student selected for this study must: 1) be a Black female, degree-seeking undergraduate, 2) be between the ages 18-23, and 3) have completed at least one semester of undergraduate coursework.

Selected participants will participate in a month long research project that will be conducted in five phases:

How to participate:

Phase 1: Preliminary Interview and Camera Training Session (1-2 hours)

Phase 2: Take photos based on prompts (1 week)

Phase 3: Secondary Interview (1-2 hours)

Phase 4: Record personal narrative or story (1 week)

To learn more about this study or sign up as a study participant, please contact Sierra R. Turner at srtturner@crimson.ua.edu. Also, you may contact Dr. Natalie Adams (faculty supervisor) at nadams@bamaed.edu

APPENDIX D: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research study titled *(Re)presenting Ourselves: Creating an “Oppositional Black Aesthetic” at a Predominantly White Institution: A Photovoice Project*

Participants: Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

Primary Investigator

Sierra R. Turner
College of Education
Department of Educational Leadership,
Policy and Technology Studies
Area: Social and Cultural Foundations, Qualitative
Research and Ethnic Studies
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Secondary Investigator

Dr. Natalie Adams
College of Education
Department of Educational Studies

Area: Educational Research

The University of Alabama
Box 870231
Carmichael Hall
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0231
nadams@ua.edu

Please read this document and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by a doctoral student in Social and Cultural Foundation at the University of Alabama. This study is part of a dissertation research project and will be overseen by the secondary investigator.

What is the study about?

Research on Black students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) indicates that Black students experience difficulty in social and academic integration. While universities across the United States have created programs and services to address the needs of Black college students (Coker, 2003; Rosales & Person, 2002), researchers have found that traditional higher education institutions still remain unsupportive of Black college students, particularly female students (Coker, 2003; Downing, 2005; Howard-Hamilton, 2004; Levey, Blanco, & Jones, 1998). The focus of this study is to use photovoice¹⁴ as a means of creating a space for an “oppositional Black aesthetic” in order to explore and document the lives and experiences of Black female college students at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the South.

¹⁴ Photovoice is a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique.” Wang & Burris, 1997

Why is this study important—What good will the results do?

The findings of this study will provide educators and academic professionals with a rich, contextual understanding of the experiences of Black college-aged females. **Why have I been asked to take part in this study?**

You either volunteered to participate in this study by contacting the researcher or you were identified and contacted by the researcher based on referrals. Additionally, you self-identify as a Black female, degree-seeking undergraduate who is at least 18 years old and has completed at least one semester of undergraduate coursework.

How many other people will be in this study?

The investigator hopes to interview at least 5-10 participants for this study.

What will I be asked to do in this study and how long will it take?

If you choose to participate in the study, Sierra R. Turner will conduct a preliminary interview (45-60 minutes) either on-line (via Skype) or at a place of your own choosing. In this preliminary interview we will explore your experiences as a Black female undergraduate student at a predominantly White institution. Additionally, you will have the chance to ask any questions you may have about the research project. At the conclusion of the preliminary interview, you will be trained (using the instructions provided by the manufacturer of the camera) on how to use the camera which will be provided by the researcher. The preliminary interview and camera training session will take anywhere between one to two hours; actual time for this session will vary based on the amount of information you decide to share and the amount of time needed to train them on how to use the camera. Once you have completed the training session, you will have one week to take photos that can be used to illustrate your daily life and experiences as a Black female student at a PWI. While little guidance will be given as to what you can take pictures of, you should spend some time taking photographs that can be used to address the following prompts: 1) Take photos that visually represent how you locate yourself in the physical spaces at the university and 2) Take photos that show how you visually (re)present yourself socially and culturally at the university. After you have taken the photos you would like to take, there will be a secondary interview (1-2 hours) where we will discuss your photos. After the secondary interview you will be issued a digital voice recorder, after you are trained on how to use it (using the instructions provided by the manufacturer of the digital recorder) and be given a week to record a personal narrative or story to accompany the photographs you previously took.

Additionally, all interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed in full. All interview materials (audio recordings, interview notes and photos) will be kept in a secure location at the residence of the primary researcher.

Once study participants complete the phases of the research project as previously delineated, the primary researcher will transcribe all interviews into text. Should the researcher need

clarification on statements made by study participants, it may be necessary for the researcher to re-contact you for clarification purposes. Your permission is necessary before the primary researcher can contact you. Please indicate below whether or not you give the researcher permission to re-contact you.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

No.

What are the risks (problems or dangers) of being in this study?

The study may have the following risk: There is minimal to no risk if you are involved in this study.

If you had a difficult experience that comes out during the phases listed above, you may experience heightened anxiety, stress or sadness when sharing the experience during the individual interview. If this occurs you will be given time to collect yourself before continuing, if you desire to do so. Please note that you may lessen these risks by not participating in the pilot study, by refusing to answer a particular question, or by not telling us things you find to be sad or stressful. For on-campus participants if you inquire about mental health services, the primary investigator will refer you to campus counselors which are available.

What are the benefits of being in this study?

The study may have the following benefit: While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, you may find it encouraging that the research may provide current educators and researchers with useful information that can be used to help them better understand the experiences of Black college-aged female students. Your participation in this study provides you with the opportunity to share your experiences in a way that can lead to policy and program changes that can provide for a more inclusive environment for all students at the university level.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

For research related purposes, the interviewer would like to record basic biographical information including your race, gender, age, academic major/minor and memberships with any on-campus organizations. The transcripts of your interviews will have any identifiable information removed. All of your data will be assigned a pseudonym chosen by you and kept together in order to separate it from the data collected from the other participants. Additional measures of confidentiality will include reasonable steps to ensure that the only persons with access to research records is the primary investigator, Institutional Review Board (IRB) professionals and other persons or agencies required by law. Such steps include storing all

research material in a secure location at the residence of the primary researcher. Audio-taped interviews will also be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Also, please note that while information gathered during this study may be published, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. However, in some instances the researcher may wish to use a direct quote from you. Considering this, you will be able to decide if the researcher can quote you at all and if you prefer your real name or pseudonym be used when you complete the permission to quote section of the Informed Consent form. While the researcher will make every effort to maintain your confidentiality, this is limited to the terms of service of Skype. Therefore, we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality of the information shared. How does Skype protect my privacy and are my personal details secure? Skype takes your security and protection of your personal details very seriously. Skype uses several security technologies and they work hard to keep your personal information safe and protected from unauthorized access or abuse. Please visit the Skype security center to learn more about your online security, safety and privacy. Skype's Privacy Policy is transparent about how they use your personal details. To learn more on how Skype shares or discloses your personal information, read How We Use Your Personal Information in their Privacy Policy. To learn more how you can protect your privacy and stay secure when using Skype, no matter what computer, smartphone or tablet you have, simply read their Frequently Asked Question on privacy and security.

What are the alternatives to being in this study?

The only alternative is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant?

Being in this study is completely voluntary. It is your free choice. You may choose not to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationships with the researcher or the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as plan.

Who can I call if I have questions or problems?

The researchers conducting this study are: Sierra R. Turner, a doctoral student in Social and Cultural foundations at the University of Alabama, and Dr. Natalie Adams, Director of New College at the University of Alabama.

If you have questions about this study, you may contact the primary researcher at srturmer@crimson.ua.edu. You may also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Natalie Adams at nadams@as.ua.edu.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

You may also questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or by contacting Tanta Myles, Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of Alabama at cmyles@fa.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online or you may ask Sierra R. Turner for a copy of the survey. You may also e-mail the IRB Outreach Office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

Statement of Consent:

Please check the statements below to indicate your consent to participate in this study:

_____ I have carefully read the information provided above, have asked questions and received answers and agree to participate in the study.

_____ I understand that I must be at least 18 years old and have completed at least one semester of school in order to participate in the study.

_____ Yes, I give permission to the researcher to contact me should she need me to clarify any statements made during the outlined phases of the pilot study.

_____ I have received a copy of this document to save for my records.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Primary Researcher

Audio Recording Consent Form

As previously mentioned, the individual qualitative interview will be audio recorded for research purposes to describe the experiences of Black female students at a PWI. These tapes will be stored in a secure location and will only be available to Sierra R. Turner (the primary investigator). The tapes and their transcriptions will be kept until the study has been concluded.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audio-taped and I give my permission to the research team to record the interviews I participate in.

_____ Yes, my participation in the individual interviews can be audio recorded.

_____ No, I do not want my participation in this interview to be audio recorded.

Photos Consent Form

___ I understand that the images will be identified with a pseudonym that I select at the beginning of the study.

___ I understand that the primary researcher will keep all the images and use them for such period as it considers appropriate, and will properly dispose of them once they are no longer needed.

Permission to Quote

Permission to Quote:

I may wish to quote your words directly in reports and publications resulting from this. With regards to being quoted, please check yes or no for each of the following statements:

___ Yes ___ No	I wish to review the notes / recordings collected during my interview.
___ Yes ___ No	I agree to be quoted directly (my name is used).
___ Yes ___ No	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published (I remain anonymous).
___ Yes ___ No	I agree to be quoted directly if a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.

APPENDIX E: Preliminary Interview Protocol

First Interview Protocol

Researcher: Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study! Your participation will offer valuable insight into the experiences of Black female undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution. Today we will spend a few minutes talking about experiences as a student at the University of Alabama. Afterwards I will explain the second part of the project which will require you to take photographs that can be used as responses to two prompts that I will forward to you after this initial interview. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Background Information:

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. What is your classification? (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior or Senior)
3. Have you already declared a major? If so, what is your major?
4. What do you plan to do once you have finished your degree?
5. What on-campus activities, if any, are you involved in?
6. Did you consider attending other universities before you ultimately chose the University of Alabama?
7. Why did you ultimately decide to attend the University of Alabama?
8. As a Black female student at a predominantly white institution, how do you think you are seen by others on campus?
9. Tell me a story that you think reflects your experiences as a student at the University of Alabama.
10. In your opinion, has the campus environment affected your experiences?
11. Can you think of examples that illustrate how Black female undergraduate students struggle at your institution? What about examples of how they excel?
12. Focusing solely on your personal experiences as a young Black woman at the University of Alabama, what would you tell University personnel (professors, administrators, etc.) if you had the opportunity to sit down and talk with them?
13. If you could change one thing about your life at the university what would it be?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to mention before we end our preliminary interview?

Researcher: Thanks again for your participation! Speaking with you today has provided some valuable insight and I look forward to the next part of the project. I will forward detailed instructions to the email address on file about the next phase of the project. In the meantime, if you think of anything else you'd like to share about today's interview please feel free to contact me at any time.

APPENDIX F: Secondary Interview Protocol

Second Interview Protocol

Part I: Let's discuss the photographs that you took using the following *PHOTO* acronym:

Describe your **P**icture.

What is **H**appening in your photo?

Why did you take a picture **O**f this?

What does this picture **T**ell us about your life?

How can this picture provide **O**pportunities for us to improve life?

Part II: Before we wrap up this interview, I have a few more questions for you.

- 1) Is this your first time using digital media to document your life and/or experiences? For example, do you use social media (i.e. Facebook, tumblr, Twitter, Instagram)?
- 2) If so, in what ways do you use these platforms?
- 3) How does it compare to what you were asked to do in this project?

Thank you so much for sharing your photos with me! I appreciate your willingness to participate in this project and share your life with me.