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Navigating White Spaces: A Phenomenological Study Of Black Women's Involvement Experiences In Predominantly White Student Organizations

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Navigating White Spaces: A Phenomenological Study Of Black Women's
Involvement Experiences In Predominantly
White Student Organizations

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Dametraus Lewis Jagers
May 2019

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DEDICATION

Thank you, Auntie Rheba, for believing in my potential even when I was a little boy. I wish that you were here to celebrate with me.

To my grandfather, Edward Lewis Jagers, Sr., I am proud to carry on the legacy of the Jagers' family.

To my father, Richard L. Williams, I know that you would be proud of this accomplishment for the Williams' legacy.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of Black women students involved in predominantly White student organizations. Student organizations provide opportunities for college students to connect to their campuses outside of the classroom. A majority of the research that exists on Black women within student affairs practices has focused on their experiences as undergraduate students at predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). While these studies have provided context and insights regarding the experiences of Black women students at PWIs in general, they did not speak specifically to the nuanced experience of organizational and power structures within settings like predominantly White student organizations. This study addressed this gap in the literature by describing the lived experiences of Black undergraduate women who were involved in predominantly White student organizations. The findings illuminate five major themes that articulate the experiences of Black women: exclusion, fake inclusion, racialized experiences, the “double minority” experience, and be stronger work harder.

The theoretical framework for this study was Black Feminist Thought (BFT). Through the lens of BFT, this study provided context to the oppressive nature of predominantly White student organizations. The four domains of BFT were juxtaposed among the five major themes of this study in order to conceptualize the nature of oppression that Black collegiate women encounter in predominantly White student organizations. This study highlighted the ways in which Black women experienced predominantly White student organizations and the forms of resistance that they employed throughout their involvement in predominantly White student organizations. The findings of this study also revealed Black women’s encounters with gendered racism in predominantly White student organizations. Finally, this qualitative study shared the

impact of the findings on the current body of research related to Black women and how the findings from this study can inform the practices of student affairs professionals who work with predominantly White student organizations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

Campus involvement refers to the psychosocial and physical ways that college students invest time, energy, and resources into a variety of collegiate activities, programs, and experiences (Astin, 1999; Shim, 2013). Research suggests that college students involved at their institutions fare better than students who are not involved and lack a sense of belonging to their college campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Campus involvement among college students enhances student success, nurtures students' sense of belonging, and helps students build positive interpersonal relationships with peers, faculty, and staff (Shook & Keup, 2012). Campus involvement has also been linked to student leadership development (Shook & Keup, 2012) and framed as a positive means for advancing social justice on college campuses (Astin & Astin, 2000; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Dugan and Komives (2007) emphasized the critical nature of diverse, peer-to-peer interactions in student leadership outcomes and found that engaging in discussions about socio-cultural issues with peers is a strong predictor of developing competency in the Social Change Model of Leadership Development.

While campus involvement is impactful for all college students, the effects of campus involvement on students vary by race/ethnicity and gender (Shim, 2013). Flowers (2004) affirmed that among Black college students, their in-class and out-of-class experiences positively influenced their student development. Furthermore, campus involvement experiences directly affect student developmental gains in personal growth, social development, critical thinking, writing skills, and vocational preparation for Black students (Flowers, 2004). Black students who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) encounter racial intolerance and social isolation

in curricular and co-curricular environments (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, & Pollio, 2004; Strayhorn, 2013; Szymanski & Lewis, 2014). Scholars argue that racial bias affects how Black students interact with peers and college administrators, often resulting in an unbalanced learning environment for Black students and, consequently, a gap in academic achievement and campus involvement between Black and White students (Cross & Slater, 2001; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus, 2008). Black students who participated in non-ethnic-specific (or majority White) student organizations, such as student government, campus activities board, and yearbook, “felt like outsiders” (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002, p. 30). These incidents influence Black students’ decisions to not seek membership in majority White student organizations (Miller, 2012). For Black women college students, there is an additional layer of tension with which they must cope. In addition to navigating negative racial perceptions, they encounter the duality of race and gender bias (Domingue, 2015; Porter & Dean, 2015; Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

Black women are faced with being members of two devalued identity groups (Watts, 2006). Black women living in a White patriarchal society often find that the value of their womanhood and Blackness are both minimized (Cloud, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Mahtani, 2004). Black women often have to choose between supporting the struggle for racial equality and supporting the struggle for women’s rights (Domingue, 2015; hooks, 1982; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). When this finding is placed in the context of other studies detailing the lived experiences of Black women in predominantly White environments (Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996; Porter, 2017; Porter & Dean, 2015; Stewart, 2002), it illuminates the notion that Black collegiate women are confronted with unique race and gender challenges at PWIs. Mensah (2010) argued that the negative racial and gender experiences that Black women encounter lead them to question their

sense of belonging on campus and result in negative psychological perspectives and a sense of disconnectedness with their campus community. In one phenomenological study, researchers posited that Black undergraduate women developed a sense of self based upon their interactions with family members and college faculty and staff, as well as with their White and Black peers (Porter & Dean, 2015). In a study exploring the factors that affect student success among Black undergraduate women, Miller (2012) observed that Black women's perceptions of institutional support and campus climate, both negative and positive, had an influence on their level of involvement within that specific institution.

Statement of the Problem

Campus involvement contributes to the learning, growth, and success of college students (Mayhew et al., 2016). Nonetheless, students do experience campus involvement environments in very different ways depending on their race and gender. Students from all racial backgrounds benefit from cross-cultural and diverse peer-to-peer interaction (Shook & Keup, 2012). It is also true that Black women college students are negatively affected by racism and sexism that have consequences for their level of involvement with non-ethnic student organizations (i.e., predominantly White student organizations) (Jones et al., 2002). The existing literature does not specifically examine the essence of the lived experiences of Black women students who are involved in non-ethnic student organizations.

Purpose of the Study

College campuses are microcosms of the larger American society (Webb, 2012). As a result, the same racial and gender challenges that exist on macro levels within society also exist on college campuses (Jones, 1990; Sweet, 2009). Academic departments, residence halls, student affairs offices, academic support programs, and student organizations are microcosms of their

campus environments (Jones, 1990; Webb, 2012). The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of Black women college students who participate in predominantly White student organizations. Based on Shelnett's (2012) discussion of historically White fraternities, for the purpose of this study, I define a PWSO as registered student organizations that have a legacy or history of recruiting relatively high percentages of White students, while adhering to exclusionary practices internally and externally to the organization. These organizations often favor the majority White population at the institution and have a substantial amount of political clout among students and university administrators (Shelnett, 2012).

Incoming college students are bombarded with messages that communicate to them the importance of being "involved on campus." Researchers confirm that students benefit from being involved and connected to their campuses through student organizations (Astin, 1999; Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Communicating to students the benefits of campus involvement is not harmful in and of itself. While these spaces and environments are not intended to harm students, the unintentional consequences of students being active in campus involvement activities can be significant (Ross, 2015). The racial and gender identities of students from vastly different cultures and experiences present many challenges for university faculty, staff, and administrators who are charged with managing these environments in a manner that generates a sense of belonging and inclusiveness for all students (Dunkel, Schuh, & Chrystal-Green, 2014). The student organizations in which students are encouraged to participate have the potential to harbor bias, racism, and sexism based upon the societal context within which campus environments exist (Dunkel et al., 2014). These inequalities are not limited to race and gender; however, this study will focus on the racialized and gendered experiences of Black women college students.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences of Black women college students who are involved in predominantly White student organizations. Scholars have examined the multiple ways in which Black women college students experience college and university campuses that are predominantly White (Domingue, 2015; Mensah, 2010; Szymanski & Lewis, 2014). However, the narratives of Black women students' experiences at these institutions have not described the essence of lived experiences of Black women students when navigating issues of racism and sexism within spaces that should be safe and nurturing (Fischer, 2007; Miller, 2012). The research question that guided the study is: What are the experiences of Black women college students within majority White campus involvement experiences?

Significance of the Study

Campus involvement is a means for college students to develop a connection to their campus, cultivate relationships with peers, form individual identities, and build self-confidence (Astin, 1999; Kaufman & Feldman, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Shook & Keup, 2012). Despite the positive benefits attributed to campus involvement, scholars maintain that Black students who attend PWIs experience racial bias and social isolation both inside and outside of the classroom (Davis et al., 2004; Porter & Parks, 2011; Ross, 2015; Strayhorn, 2013). More research is needed to understand the nature of Black women college students' experiences within defined settings, such as predominantly White student organizations, at PWIs. This study sought to close the gap in the literature related to Black women college students' lived experiences as members of predominantly White student organizations.

Intersectionality and Black Feminist Thought

The main theoretical framework that guided this study was Black Feminist Thought (BFT). Secondly, intersectionality theory was also used to frame this study. Intersectionality

emerged as a collective approach to understanding the challenges of oppression examined by both race and gender by offering a Black feminist critique of existing research and scholarship that approached race and gender as completely disjointed categories (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw's (1989) assessment of the existing body of literature and research revealed that Black women's perspectives were nonexistent or overlooked. More than a critique of existing research and scholarship, the construction of intersectionality was a robust critique of contemporary legal cases that failed to recognize the uniqueness of the Black woman's experience. Crenshaw (1989) presented a host of legal cases in which court systems had failed to administer legal judgment that embraced the intersection of the Black woman's identity as both Black (non-male) and woman (non-White). Judicial decisions had failed to provide legal reprieve for Black women in employment cases if the court did not feel that the plaintiff (a Black woman) was not discriminated against because of her identity as a woman. Examples of anti-discrimination cases exposed the narrow scope of anti-discrimination doctrine and its failure to embrace intersectionality. Furthermore, it also revealed the pervasiveness of White female experiences in the conceptualization of gender discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). In cases where Black women plaintiffs would cite discrimination, the court gave leniency to employers if they could provide minimal evidence that the organization had hired or promoted White women within the organization. If a Black woman raised a racial discrimination claim, it was left up to the plaintiff to prove that such discrimination took place. However, Black women were limited in their use of evidence to support their claim because the court might determine that certain statistical data could not be utilized by the plaintiff.

This discovery communicated to Black women that courts were unwilling to validate their individual experiences of being women *and* Black. The courts' failure to acknowledge

intersectionality reinforced the dominant narrative of patriarchy and White normativity (Crenshaw, 1989). Black Feminist Thought (BFT) added to the ongoing conversation on intersectionality and the Black woman's experience (Collins, 1990; Patton & Croom, 2017). Black feminist epistemology, or BFT, is grounded in the study of knowledge and how knowledge is created as a result of social influences (Collins, 1990). The focus on the intersection of identity then creates alternative forms of knowledge that "are built upon lived experience, not upon an objectified position" (Collins, 1990, p. 3).

Collins (1990) provided greater attention to how intersectionality influenced the experiences of Black women and communicated the implications of such experiences on the social realities of Black women. She categorized the social experience of Black women into four domains:

Structural – outlines the organization of power within the legal system, political arena, religious entities and the economic system.

Disciplinary – describes how organizational structures are managed in a way that "hides the effects of racism and sexism under the canopy of efficiency, rationality, and equal treatment" (p. 8).

Hegemonic - serves as a means to socialize people into organizations and structures, whereby individuals adhere to socially acceptable norms, behaviors and thought processes.

Interpersonal - uncovers individual experiences and perspectives of the individual as well as self-identity.

In each domain, there is a different encounter that ultimately shapes the vantage point of Black women. Intersectionality is concerned with understanding the implication of multiple

identities on the individual and allows individuals the opportunity to assess the overlap of relationships among multiple identities (i.e., race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, etc.). Once disconnected, individuals are able to interpret how relationships of power, knowledge, and empowerment can be used as a tool for liberation from social structures (Collins, 1990; Patton & Croom, 2017; Porter, 2017).

Broadly speaking, intersectionality can be applied to a variety of disciplines. Despite its origins in the field of legal studies, it has also been used in the fields of sociology, psychology, feminist studies, and critical race theory (Cole, 2009; Collins, 1990; Vervliet, De Mol, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2014). The fluidity of intersectionality allows it to be used by interdisciplinary scholars as a means to measure the collective influence of social structures across multiple arenas. Intersectionality can also be used as a tool for activism and resistance against oppression (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989) because it can offer a counternarrative that challenges previously held assumptions about identity and pushes back on dominant ideologies. As such, it is important to understand the implications of enacting intersectionality in this way.

BFT advocates that in an environment saturated by intersecting oppression, no solitary group or movement can gain power without oppressing others (Alina, 2015; Johnson, 2017). The result is that the struggles of Black women and other marginalized groups cannot be isolated or disconnected from the larger struggles for social justice (Alina, 2015). Intersectionality can be applied as an analytic lens to understand the nature of oppression within organizations, systems, and social structures (Johnson, 2017; Syed, 2010). It has also been used to understand the nature of relationships and oppression among socially constructed concepts such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (MacKinnon, 2013). This research study used BFT and intersectionality to analyze the lived experiences of Black women college students in the context

of predominantly White student organizations. Furthermore, BFT fits well within the parameters of this study's aim to investigate the lived experiences of Black collegiate women (Porter, 2017).

Terminology

The following are definitions for key terms were used frequently in the literature and will be referenced throughout this study:

Campus involvement – Refers to the ways that college students decide to spend both physical and psychological energy into activities and experiences beyond their academic responsibility (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Intersectionality - Denotes the various ways in which race, gender, and social class interact to shape the multiple dimensions of the everyday lived experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989).

Predominantly White institutions (PWIs)– Higher education institutions that have a disproportionate number of White students in relation to the racial demographics of the United States of America. Such institutions have a student population in which 70% or more of students identify as White (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

Predominantly White student organizations (PWSO) – PWSOs are registered student organizations that have a legacy or history of recruiting relatively high percentages of White students, while adhering to exclusionary practices internally and externally to the organization (Shelnutt, 2012).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research problem that this study addressed and the context in which the problem was examined and studied. The chapter provided a rationale for the necessity of this study and the guiding theoretical lens that grounded the study. Chapter 2

will review the literature that existed on the research topic and the theoretical perspectives that undergird this study. Chapter 3 will outline the research methodology, data collection techniques and data analysis that will be used in this study. Chapter 4 describes the five themes that emerged from the data. Finally, chapter 5 will provide a theoretical analysis regarding the study's findings and discuss the implications of the findings of this study regarding research and practice, for student affairs practioners and faculty.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provided a review of the literature related to this study. This chapter evaluated the history of Blacks in higher education with a specific focus on Black women. The literature review also served as a framework to understand both the historical and contemporary work of scholars who have studied Black women college students at PWIs. The literature review also outlined the role and influence that campus involvement has on student identity, social development and students' sense of belonging on college campuses. Furthermore, this literature review contextualized the lived experiences of Black collegiate women within campus involvement activities.

Higher Education and the Legacy of Discrimination

Rooted in the history of U.S. higher education is a legacy of racism, sexism, and denial of civil rights for Black and other People of Color (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). In 1832, the president of the College of William and Mary co-authored the intellectual defense of slavery by maintaining that slavery was not a sin but rather an independent social institution that existed without the influence of God (Thelin, 2011). Even as higher education institutions progressed and grew in size, there was little evidence that Blacks were considered crucial to the educational mission of colonial institutions (Thelin, 2011).

The Civil War and the Morrill Act of 1862 shifted the mission of higher education in the U.S., which resulted in increased access to educational opportunities for White women (Graham, 1978). The Morrill Act of 1862 was a catalyst for what we now know as public higher education as land grants were given to new states for the purposes of building public colleges and schools (Thelin, 2011). The 1865 Civil War victory of the Union over the Confederate States of America

brought freedom and opportunities for nearly four million newly-freed slaves (Gold, 2010). Through legislation of the U.S. Congress, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands – also known as the Freedmen’s Bureau – was created in 1865 to mandate educational opportunities, access to healthcare, rights to land ownership, and employment opportunities for newly freed, Black male citizens (Brown, 2004).

With the support of the federal government and missionaries from the American Missionary Association, several new free educational programs and schools were established to educate Blacks, Native Americans, and poor Whites (Stuart, 2016). The Freedman’s Bureau only existed for seven years due to an inordinate degree of opposition from wealthy White men who did not want Blacks to have access to the same liberties as White citizens. The majority of the ongoing oppression that Blacks experienced was a result of “Black Codes” signed into law in 1865, which restricted and limited the civil rights of recently freed Blacks (Lichtenstein, 2004).

Black Codes prevented the social interaction of Blacks and Whites in certain places, prohibited Blacks from worshipping in White churches, and made it illegal for Blacks to marry Whites (Lichtenstein, 2004). Blacks and their northern White allies resisted such laws and were moderately successful when the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which was short-lived. The interpretation of the law by the court systems provided a loophole for legalized segregation, Jim Crow laws, which led to unequal access to education, employment opportunities, homeownership, health care facilities, and entertainment venues for Southern Blacks. Black Codes were no longer legal, but until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Jim Crow laws took their place (Lichtenstein, 2004). While progress for Black men was somewhat visible, Black women still had limited rights and opportunities for engaging equally in society.

The passage of the second Morrill Act in 1890 gave Black men access to public higher education opportunities (Jenkins, 1991), by mandating that funds for education be distributed equitably on an annual basis, establishing 17 state-supported institutions to educate Blacks in 17 states (Brazzell, 1996; Harper et al., 2009). Of the institutions that were established as a result of the Morrill Act of 1890, a majority were normal schools offering training for those interested in being teachers and preachers (Harper et al., 2009). The negative implication of the 1890 Morrill Act was that it legalized the segregation of Black and White state institutions of higher education (Jenkins, 1942; Harper et al., 2009). The separate but equal ideology that legalized the segregation of state institutions resulted in Black institutions, both private and public, receiving inadequate funding and less than equitable curriculum models. Despite the progress that had been made for educational attainment of Blacks, the subjugated status of women meant that progress towards educational equity for Black women would lag behind that of Black men (Crocco & Waite, 2007).

Black Women, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Social Movement

In the 1920s and 1930s, college administrators such as Lucy Diggs Slowe fought against the male-dominated administration at Black colleges to ensure that women students had adequate and equal residential facilities (Gasman, 2010). Along with the struggles of Black women at Black colleges, new challenges emerged as Black women and men began to apply for admission to PWIs in the 1930s and 1940s (Harper et al., 2009; Rogers, 2012). In defiance of the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* United States Supreme Court decision of 1954, many White southern college administrators insisted on maintaining segregation at their institutions (Harper et al., 2009; Rogers, 2012). The *Brown v. Board* decision overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, deeming it no longer constitutional for educational institutions at any level to

operate as separate but equal (Flowers, 2005). Students planned lunch counter sit-ins, community marches, and campus sit-ins in more than 75 communities across the nation to protest against segregationist practices at colleges and universities (Rogers, 2012).

Black women college students such as Diane Nash, Ella Baker, and Priscilla and Patricia Stephens were at the forefront of many demonstrations (Rogers, 2012). At Bennett College, an HBCU (historically Black college or university) founded by the Methodist church, Black women students led marches, picket lines, and sit-ins (Flowers, 2005). Barbara Harris and Diane Nash, students at Fisk University, were arrested for their involvement in protesting segregated lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee (Gasman, 2010). Many Black women students were simultaneously involved in both the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Campus Movement (BCM), (Rogers, 2012). The BCM focused on changing higher education practices and policies that impeded the success of Black students at PWIs (Hughes-Watkins, 2017; Rogers, 2012). Interwoven and yet separate from the larger Civil Rights Movement, this movement of Black students on college and universities campuses would become a strong force for radical change at higher education institutions from the late 1960s and well into the 1970s and 1980s (Hughes-Watkins, 2017).

Activism of Black Collegiate Women

Black women college students have a rich history of social activism in college and university environments (Cloud, 2013). The BCM was widely successful in its efforts to create more inclusive campus environments for Black students due to the leadership and involvement of Black women students (Franklin, 2014; Rogers, 2012). The institutional practices of racial discrimination and the underrepresentation of Black faculty, staff, and administrators moved students to engage in campus protests and demonstrations (Fenderson, Stewart, & Baumgartner,

2012). Black students demanded to have organizations that exclusively represented their concerns (Rogers, 2012). In addition, students sought to have Black culture and history embodied in curricular and co-curricular experiences (Rogers, 2012).

Black Student Unions (BSUs) were a primary method of organizing and support for students as they sought racial progress (Hughes-Watkins, 2017). The first BSU was established at San Francisco State College (Hughes-Watkins, 2017; Rogers, 2012). The collective voice of Black students organized through BSUs led to the creation of Black Cultural Centers and Black Studies programs at several institutions (Fenderson et al., 2012). Black Cultural Centers served as a physical and symbolic place where Black students could gather and socialize in a non-threatening environment (Flowers & Shuford, 2011). Simultaneously, Black women college students combatted sexism within the ranks of BSUs, student government associations, and the Black Power Movement (Rogers, 2012). As they labored for racial justice, many Black women activists would become more conscious of gender bias and discrimination causing them to redirect energy and resources to addressing issues of sexism and gender discrimination within the Black Power Movement and the BCM (Cloud, 2013; Patton, 2005).

As the civil rights era drew to a close, Black women shifted their focus to combatting issues of gender equality (Brah & Phoenix, 2016; Collins, 2000; Rogers, 2012). Contemporary Black collegiate women's activism is a byproduct of Black women college students' experiences with both racism and sexism (Cloud, 2013). Black women collegiate activists were – and still are – empowered by the work of Black feminist scholars, serving as a foundation for organizing and responding to issues of campus diversity, racism, and sexism (Perez & Williams, 2014). The empowerment derived from organizing, marching, and protesting was and is a lens that

contributes to self-knowledge and a collective meaning amongst Black women situated in predominantly White settings (Collins, 2000; Hope, Keels & Durkee, 2016; Kynard, 2011).

Black college women activists of the 1960s and 1970s and those of today share some characteristics. Most notable are the differences in terms of practice and motivation for activism (Cloud, 2013; Hope et al., 2016). Protesting, organizing, and marches are methods still used by today's Black college women activists, yet advances in technology and access to social media has widened the scope and reach of their cause (Cloud, 2013; Hope et al., 2016). In recent years, entire campus movements have been led by Black women college students as advancements in technology have made new tools for activism accessible to contemporary college students; for instance, the "I Too, Am Harvard" movement was launched using the social media tool Tumblr that allows users to upload sharable photo albums (Cloud, 2013). The "I Too, Am Harvard" social media activist movement was started by a Black college woman sophomore as a response to institutional racism experienced by Black students at Harvard University and inspired other Black students at other predominantly White campuses to initiate similar campaigns (Butler, 2014).

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was organized by three Black women. The movement circulated across college and university campuses after a series of unarmed Black men and women were killed by police officers (Hope et al., 2016). Black women collegiate activists, inspired by BLM, organized campus demonstrations and worked from within BSUs and other Students of Color organizations to advocate for racial equity and inclusion (Garza, 2014; Hope et al., 2016). Black women student activism has evolved since the civil rights era as tools such as blogging, journaling, social media campaigns, and other visual media platforms have

become a part of the collective form of resistance to unjust practices on college and university campuses (Cloud, 2013; Hope et al., 2016; Kaynard, 2011; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw (1989) to advocate for a more collective approach to understanding the challenges to oppression in the U.S. legal system by examining the racialized and gendered experiences of Black women. Crenshaw (1989) argued that the experiences and perspectives of Black women were nonexistent and overlooked within both the current legal system and existing scholarship and revealed how dominant perspectives about discrimination had bounded the way that people thought about, conceptualized, and enforced laws with a singular frame of reference. Intersectionality, therefore, provides a multidimensional approach to understanding the experiences of marginalized populations (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality also critiques the dominant historical narratives that place limitations on the experiences of Black women (Davis, 2008).

Collins (1990) advanced intersectionality with an emphasis on the Black feminist epistemology of Black Feminist Thought (BFT). BFT was grounded in the study of knowledge and how knowledge is created as a result of social influences (Collins, 1990). The focus on the intersection of identity created alternative forms of knowledge that “were built upon lived experience not upon an objectified position” (Collins, 1990, p. 3). The result is that the struggles of Black women and other marginalized groups should not be isolated or disjointed from the wider societal struggles for social justice (Alina, 2015).

The use of intersectionality theory in higher education has afforded researchers and scholars in college and university settings insights about the lived experiences of marginalized student populations (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Hearn, 2012; Malcom & Mendoza, 2014;

Mirza, 2009). Intersectionality has been employed to explore ethnic identity development, male-to-female relationship dynamics, student engagement, student sense of belonging, and diversity issues related to campus climate (Abes, 2012; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Maramba & Museus, 2011; Strayhorn, 2013). In addition to race and gender, intersectionality is an appropriate framework with which to examine other intersecting identities such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and religion (Domingue, 2015; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; MacKinnon, 2013). Used appropriately, intersectionality can be an analytic lens for understanding the nature of oppression within organizations, systems, and social structures (Syed, 2010) and to understand how oppression within socially constructed contexts affect individuals and their relationships (MacKinnon, 2013).

Black Feminism

Anna Julia Cooper, a former slave and two-time graduate of Oberlin College authored *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman from the South* (1892), which became known as the first of its kind in terms of analyzing the condition of Blacks and women grounded in feminist thought. It also detailed the ways in which Black women experienced oppression as a result of their dual identities as Black and as women (Collins, 2015; McGoldrick, 1995). Black women who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement inspired a renewed type of activism that was steered by Black women in the form of political activism and academic scholarship (Collins, 2015; Taylor, 1998). The foundation for Black feminism had been shaped decades earlier when freed slave Sojourner Truth stood before a group of predominantly White women and delivered her groundbreaking speech, “Ain’t I a Woman,” at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention in 1851 (Cloud, 2013). Her speech meticulously described the complexities of being a woman but not receiving the treatment that was given to other women because she was a Black woman.

“Ain’t I a Woman” was the formative contribution to the stability and progression of Black feminist theory and intersectionality theory (Collins, 1989; 2015; Crenshaw, 1989).

Contemporary scholars use this speech as a framework for Black feminist and intersectionality scholarship (Brah & Phoenix, 2016; Crenshaw, 1990; hooks, 1990; Smith, 2013). Crenshaw (1989) offered a Black feminist critique of existing research and scholarship that approached race and gender as completely disjointed categories. Her assessment of existing research revealed that the experiences and perspectives of Black women were nonexistent or overlooked.

Collins (1990) subsequently introduced Black feminist epistemology or Black Feminist Thought, which was grounded in the study of knowledge and how knowledge is created as a result of the social experiences of Black women due to their “unique angle of vision concerning Black womanhood” (p. 35). Collins (2000) also articulated that BFT is a social theory that “reflects the distinctive themes of African-American women’s experiences [that] rely upon paradigms that emphasize the importance of intersecting oppressions” (p. 251). BFT contributed to the ongoing discourse on intersectionality and the Black woman’s experience (Collins, 1990). Collins (1990) expanded the notion of intersectionality by providing more attention to how intersectionality effects the lived experiences of Black women and the implications of such experiences on the social realities of Black women. Beyond the focus on the dual identities of race and gender, Collins (2000) categorized the social experiences of Black women in four main categories referred to as “domains” (p. #): structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal.

The structural domain involves organizational power within systems, and the disciplinary domain exposes how organizational structures manage oppression in a way that “hides the effects of racism and sexism under the canopy of efficiency, rationality, and equal treatment” (Collins, 1990, p. 8). The hegemonic domain characterizes how people are socialized into

organizations and structures that breed compliance to socially acceptable norms, behaviors, and thought processes (Collins, 1990). Finally, the interpersonal domain encompasses the experiences and perspectives of the individual, as well as self-identity (Collins, 1990). Within each domain there is a different encounter, which ultimately shapes the experience and perspectives of Black women.

Collins (1990) was concerned with understanding the implications of intersectionality for the individual. BFT allows individuals the opportunity to examine the overlapping relationships among multiple identities (i.e., race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, etc.). Once the overlapping relationships are disconnected, individuals are able to interpret how relationships of power, knowledge, and empowerment can be used as a tool for liberation from social structures (Collins, 1990). The intent and aim of BFT is not to be a “one size fits all” solution to oppression and injustice experienced by Black women (Collins, 2000). However, BFT can serve as a tool of analysis for critiquing hegemonic structures and understanding the shared experiences of Black women (Collins, 1998; Cloud, 2013). Taylor argued (1998):

The ultimate goal of Black feminism is to create a political movement that not only struggles against exploitative capitalism and what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham calls the "racialized construction of sexuality" but that also seeks to develop institutions to protect what the dominant culture has little respect and value for – Black women's minds and bodies. (p. 18)

The knowledge that is created through BFT reported in the stories of Black women address the intersecting, multi-dimensional lived experiences of Black women (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989).

Black Women College Students

There is abundant literature regarding the racialized and gendered experiences of Black women at PWIs (Domingue, 2015; Donovan, 2014; Miles, Jones, Clemons, & Golay, 2011; Patton, 2017; Porter, 2017; Porter & Dean, 2015; Roland & Agosto, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2009; 2014). It is also recognized that Black women students' experiences with racism and sexism are not analogous at HBCUs, single-gender institutions, or women's HBCUs (Blackmon & Coyle, 2017; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007; Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, & Kuh, 2007; Njoku & Patton, 2017; Perkins, 2017;). Kinzie et al. (2007) posited that Black women students at women's colleges feel less supported than their White counterparts and were less satisfied with campus climate. Despite the documented benefits of attending a single-sex institution, Black women students were less engaged and less satisfied with their college experience than their White counterparts (Kinzie et al., 2007). According to Harper et al. (2007), survey data from Black students at 12 four-year HBCUs concluded that despite Black women outnumbering their male counterparts in the classroom, Black women spent less time interacting with faculty than did their male peers. These findings illuminate the often overlooked and forgotten challenges that Black women students experience in their academic and social integration on college campuses (Commodore, Baker, & Arroyo, 2018; Donahoo, 2017; Harper et al., 2007; Winkle-Wagner, 2014). When compared to their Black male counterparts, Black women students are often elevated as models of success despite experiencing their own unique challenges (Commodore et al., 2018; Winkle-Wagner, 2014). Donahoo (2017) discussed how the hyper-elevation of Black women students above their male counterparts created the concept of a Black woman as "superwoman" (p. 62). The expectation of "superwoman" falsely portrayed

Black women as formidable, capable of managing themselves and others, able to meet and overcome all challenges, and wholly independent (Donahoo, 2017).

Similar to the superwoman label is the “strong Black woman” (Donovan & West, 2014, p. 384) stereotype which idealizes the strength and care-giving abilities of Black women. Celebrating Black women as strong, caregiving, and resilient, are all positive characteristics; however, these characteristics often prevent Black women students from obtaining the social and emotional support they need to effectively survive common college student transitions and challenges (Donahoo, 2017). The “superwoman” and “strong Black woman” stereotypes are commonly embraced as badges of honor among Black women students (Donovan & West, 2014). The expectation to care for others or the reality of caring for others, while simultaneously managing ones own challenges can create unhealthy coping and stress management behaviors for Black women (Watson & Hunter, 2015). Researchers caution higher education practitioners about placing unrealistic expectations of success and independence on Black women students (Blackmon & Coyle, 2017; Donahoo, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2014). These stereotypical expectations can contribute to higher levels of stress and negative implications for the mental health of Black women (Blackmon & Coyle, 2017). Other scholars suggest that university staff and faculty should be proactive about normalizing the use of therapy and mental health services among Black women, as well as reframing “strength as being able to ask for help instead of suffering in silence” (Donovan & West, 2015, p. 392).

Black Undergraduate Women at Predominantly White Institutions

Black collegiate women at PWIs consistently shift between the socially accepted norms of being Black and women (Domingue, 2015; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). As a result of Black women’s dual membership within two historically marginalized

identities, Black women students experience an ongoing sense of two-ness (Cooper, 2010; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Two-ness refers to the obligation that is placed upon a Black woman to exist and operate in two separate realms: Blackness and womanhood. Her Black identity requires her to understand the socially accepted behaviors of her Blackness and to be simultaneously adept with the rules and negotiations of being a woman while not always being treated as such (Cooper, 2010; Delgado, 2011).

Research on Black undergraduate women's lived experiences as members of PWSOs has not been contextualized to account for the nuances of gendered racism that exist in these campus involvement settings (Croom, Beatty, Acker & Butler, 2017; Roland & Agosto, 2017). What is known is that Black undergraduate women encounter sexism and racism in classroom settings, residential environments, and among their White peers at PWIs (Croom et al., 2017; Domingue, 2015; Roland & Agosto, 2017). A more accurate depiction of Black women's experiences with gender bias and racism that takes into account the intersectionality of their experiences is gendered racism. Gendered racism is the interweaving of racism and sexism that describes racist ideas and thoughts that are derived from perceptions about gender roles (Essed, 1991; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Browne Hunt, 2013). Scholars have also documented the consistency with which Black women students are exposed to racial microaggressions (Hotchkins, 2017; Szymanski & Lewis, 2014). Racial microaggressions are:

Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group. They are not limited to human encounters alone but may also be environmental in nature. (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273).

Experience with racial microaggressions can range from stereotypical assumptions about dialect, to comments about place of origin, or verbal assaults about natural hair-styles (Domingue, 2015; Patton, 2017). Black women students also encounter gendered racial microaggressions (Lewis et al., 2013; Roland & Agosto, 2017). Gendered racial microaggressions are defined as the “subtle and everyday verbal, behavioral, and environmental expressions of oppression based on the intersection of one’s race and gender” (Lewis et al., 2013, p. 766). Research has also highlighted that Black women experiences with gendered racism can induce stress and has the potential to influence the ongoing mental health and academic success of Black undergraduate women (Donovan & Guillory, 2017; Lewis et al., 2013). The racial and gender-related stress that Black women experience is compounded when considered among the other stress factors induced by other hidden identities (i.e., as first-generation college students or members of low socioeconomic groups) (Fischer, 2007).

To cope with racial and gender-related stress that comes with these experiences, Black women have sought out safe places within ethnic specific organizations such historically Black sororities and other groups specifically for Black women (Croom et al., 2017; Miles et al., 2011; Porter & Dean, 2015). Historically Black sororities can serve as a space for empowerment, mentorship, and professional networking opportunities for Black women students at PWIs (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). While similarities among the experiences of Black women at small liberal arts colleges and large public institutions may exist; it is widely accepted among scholars that Black undergraduate women’s experiences are diverse and vary based on individual experiences and intersecting identities (Commodore et al., 2018; Croom et al., 2017; Patton, Haynes & Croom, 2017).

Campus Involvement

Research suggests that college students who are connected to their college campus through campus involvement fare better than students who are not engaged; and have a stronger sense of belonging to their campuses (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2010; Webber, Krylow & Zhang, 2013). Sense of belonging is defined as “a generalized sense of membership that stems from the student’s perception of their involvement in a variety of settings and the support, academic and social, they experience from faculty, staff, and peers” (Tinto, 2010, p. 72). Students who lacked a sense of belonging withdrew from their involvement and were more likely to leave their institution prior to graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2010). Campus involvement is defined as the psychosocial and physical ways that students invest time, energy, and resources into a variety of collegiate activities, programs, and experiences (Astin, 1999; Shim, 2013). Campus involvement includes both academic engagement and social activities such as interactions with faculty outside of the classroom or membership in student organizations (Tinto, 2010).

Campus involvement encourages college students to cultivate relationships with peers, supports identity development, and builds self-confidence (Astin, 1999; Kaufman & Feldman, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Shook & Keup, 2012). Researchers maintain that students involved on their campuses are more successful academically than their non-involved peers (Bergen-Cico & Viscomi, 2013; Shook & Keup, 2012). Campus involvement also has been noted as a condition of student retention and has been shown to have increased influence on the retention of academically underprepared, first-generation, and low-income students (Tinto, 2010; Webber et al., 2013). Aside from the academic benefits of campus involvement, scholars also associate increases in cognitive skill development, communication skills, self-confidence

and interpersonal skills with campus involvement (Huang & Chang, 2004; Webber et al., 2013). Another positive outcome of campus involvement is psychological well-being, which refers to the personal development of students, existence of positive relationship with others, and having a sense of purpose in one's life (Kilgo et al., 2016). This outcome is especially important considering the high percentage of college students who experience mental health challenges as undergraduate students (American College Health Association, 2014). Campus involvement can serve as a catalyst for students to balance and integrate their academic and social lives throughout their collegiate experience (Palmer, Maramba, & Holmes, 2011). Furthermore, some scholars posit that more campus involvement is better for some college students in terms of student success (Astin, 1984; Huang & Chang, 2004).

Black Students and Campus Involvement Experiences

Campus involvement has been shown to have a positive influence on the growth and development of Black college students (Flowers, 2004). Campus involvement directly influences gains in personal development, social development, critical thinking, writing skills, and vocational preparation for Black students (Flowers, 2004; Flowers & Shuford, 2011). Despite the positive benefits attributed to campus involvement, researchers have found that Black students who attend PWIs experience racial bias and social isolation inside and outside of the classroom (Davis et al., 2004; Strayhorn, 2013; Szymanski & Lewis, 2014). Research has revealed that Black students are less involved in campus involvement activities when compared to their White counterparts (Flowers, 2004; Frazier, 2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Strayhorn, 2010). Despite the evidence that campus involvement supports social engagement and personal development, Black students are less likely to participate in these activities at PWIs (Harper, 2013; Museus, 2008). Instead, Black students seek out ethnic student organizations (ESOs) at PWIs that

function as spaces for Black students to express their identity (Museus, 2008). ESOs also serve as a catalyst for institutional change and increased cultural awareness through student activism for Black students (Museus, 2008).

Black students attending PWIs often experience isolation, chilly climate, and stereotype threats, which can impede students' level of comfort when engaging in campus involvement (Harper, 2013; Hope, Chavous, Jagers, & Sellers, 2013; Massey & Owens, 2014). Furthermore, research indicates that among all student groups, Black college students had the highest average perception of negative campus racial climates (Frischer, 2007; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Harper, 2013). Experiences of racial bias and stereotype threat influences the manner in which Black students interact with peers and administrators, and it also creates an unbalanced learning environment for Black students and consequently, a gap in the achievement and engagement between Black students and their White peers (Harper, 2013; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Encounters and interactions with racism and racial stereotypes at PWIs influence Black students interest and desire to participate in campus involvement experiences such as registered student organizations (Harper, 2013; Hope et al., 2013; Littleton, 2002; Massey & Owens, 2014; Museus, 2008).

Black Undergraduate Women's Intersecting Identities

Black women college students at PWIs are situated within structural environments that often hinder opportunities to create self-identity. (Kynard, 2011; Linden & Rodriguez, 2012). Watts (2006) asserted that Black women are faced with being members of two devalued groups – female (gender) and Black (race). For Black women students, being situated in a White patriarchal society implies that the value of their womanhood and Blackness is often minimized (Watts, 2006; Winkle-Wagner, 2014). In addition, Black women often find themselves forced to

choose between the struggle for racial equality over the struggle for women's rights, which ultimately divides their identities (hooks, 1981). Placed in context, this finding supports the notion that Black women on college campuses face unique racial and gender challenges as members of two devalued groups (Carter & Parks, 1996; Miller, 2017; Stewart, 2002).

Donovan and Guillory (2017) discussed the stereotypical images that are unique to the experiences of Black undergraduate women. As a result of their dual identities, Black women are faced with multifaceted stereotypes associated with being both Black and women (Donovan & Guillory, 2017). The negative racial and gendered experiences that Black women encounter have led them to question their sense of belonging on college campuses and resulted in negative psychological and social consequences (Mensah, 2010; Miller, 2017). Black collegiate women's perception of institutional support and campus climate influences their level of involvement on their campuses (Miller, 2012). Therefore, Black women college students' exposure to racism and sexism has the potential to influence their level of involvement in non-ethnic student organizations (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Miller, 2017). The result of these experiences is that Black women students feel less supported than their White counterparts and are less satisfied with campus climates (Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, & Kuh, 2007; Miller, 2007). Black women collegiate's experiences with gendered racism at PWIs is well documented in the literature (Commodore et al., 2018; Croom et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2013; Mensah, 2010; Miller, 2017; Patton, 2017; Patton et al., 2017; Watts, 2006; Winkle-Wagner, 2014). The current body of literature is scarce in terms of investigating the essence of the lived experiences of Black women college students in predominantly White student organizations. Furthermore, additional research is needed to understand how Black collegiate women navigate campus involvement

experiences, specifically within PWSOs in light of the inherent racism and sexism that exist at PWIs (Croom, 2017; Donovan & Guillory, 2017; Porter, 2017; Porter & Dean, 2014).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of current literature related to contemporary and historical experiences of Black women college students at predominantly White institutions. It also discussed the various ways that Black women students encounter racial and gender bias. A brief historical perspective of Black women undergraduate experiences and their involvement at PWIs with campus racial climate and student activism was also provided in this chapter. Black feminism and intersectional theories are addressed in this chapter, as they provide context for understanding the multiple identities of Black women. In addition, the role of student involvement on college campuses, and the positive benefits that it can provide to Black women students were detailed in this chapter. Finally, the chapter noted the gap in the literature relative to the significance of campus involvement and the way that Black women students might experience predominantly White student organizations because of racial and

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The following chapter serves as a detailed description of my research methodology and design. This chapter provides an overview of qualitative research and a more detailed depiction of phenomenology, the method of choice for my study. I also discuss my responsibility as a researcher and how I accounted for my biases to avoid misinterpreting the lived experiences of my research participants. Finally, this chapter outlines the methods that I employed to gain access to research participants, how I collected and analyzed data, as well as the measures that I took to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Qualitative Inquiry

This study investigated the ways in which Black collegiate women experience predominantly White student organizations. The research question that guided my study was: What are the experiences of Black women college students involved in predominantly White student organizations? This study was guided by a qualitative research perspective, which allows one to obtain descriptive data through the lived experiences of research participants (Hesse-Biber, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that “qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (p. 23). Qualitative research seeks to “achieve an *understanding* of how people make sense out of their lives and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). Qualitative inquiry brings with it a level of responsibility on the part of myself as the researcher because I served as the principal instrument for collecting data (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). This responsibility required that I, as researcher, acknowledge my own biases and perspectives to eliminate misinterpreting the

experiences of my research participants. Finally, qualitative inquiry lends itself well to an inductive process, whereby I was able to connect and form concepts through the collection and analysis of rich, descriptive data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The inductive process guided me in identifying core themes that existed within my data (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). I utilized interviews, observations, field notes, and memo-writing to develop descriptive data that anchored the findings of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Methodology: Phenomenology

I employed a phenomenological research methodology for this study. Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology, with its roots in the field of philosophy (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It is concerned with the study of lived experiences from the perspective of the individual, which links taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving (Lester, 1999). Phenomenology was established by the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (Moran, 2000; Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). In its earliest stages, Husserl thought of phenomenology as a way to transform the way that individuals approached the field of philosophy and to re-center the focus of philosophy on “the life of the living human subject” (Moran, 2000, p. 5). Husserl promoted a style of phenomenology that “demanded that each experience be taken in its own right as it shows itself and as one is conscious of it” (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974, p. 22). All that one is conscious of, including moods, feelings, desires, natural objects or values, Husserl referred to as *phenomena* (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974).

Beyond its origins as a philosophical reference for understanding the lives and interactions of people, phenomenology has been viewed – and continues to be viewed – as a scientific approach to “describe particular phenomena, or the appearance of things, as lived experience” (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007, p. 76). Wagner (1983) explained phenomenology as:

a system of interpretation that helps us perceive and conceive ourselves, our contacts and interchanges with others, and everything else in the realm of our experiences in a variety of ways, including to describe a method as well as a philosophy or way of thinking. (p. 8)

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) maintained that, as a research methodology, the philosophy of phenomenology serves as foundational perspective for all qualitative research. For the context of this study, phenomenology was used as a tool to investigate the essence of shared experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) among Black women college students who were involved in predominantly White student organizations. In others words, the shared lived experiences of participants were told in their own words and through their own discernments. The shared lived experience, or the ‘phenomena’ (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974), revealed the content of participants’ consciousness and awareness of their identity as Black women. Phenomenology was most appropriate for this study because it seeks to understand the shared lived experiences that led to a more profound understanding of the phenomenon being studied (i.e., Black women students in predominantly White student organizations) (Davis, 2012; Van Manen, 1997). The intersection of Black women’s experience as both Black and women involved in PWSOs is a unique experience that can only be understood by another through the expressed or shared lived experience by one that has experienced it. Phenomenology’s primary goal as a research methodology is to describe the lived experience of those that have experienced a phenomenon (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). In this study, the phenomenon that was studied was the experience of Black women students who are involved in predominantly White student organizations. Phenomenology served as a channel for describing the feelings, perceptions, and moods of participants in this study (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974).

Participants

As a qualitative researcher, I was interested in exploring the lived experiences of the participants in my study. Drawn from the perspective of phenomenology, qualitative inquiry emphasizes human experience and human interpretation of lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants for this research study were Black college women who were involved in predominantly White student organizations. I was the primary research instrument, and my goal was to capture how participants reflected on their experiences and ascertain how they made sense of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify participants for this study. Purposeful, or criteria-based sampling, outlined specific criteria participants had to meet to participate in the research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful, or purposive sampling, ensured that participants met the standard of uniqueness that was defined for the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued that purposeful sampling produces “information-rich-cases” (p. 96). Information rich-cases are described as “cases in which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96).

To participate in this study, a potential participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) self-identify as a Black woman; (b) attend a predominantly White college or university; and (c) be active within a predominantly White student organization (i.e., campus programming boards, student government associations, student alumni organizations, college/university recruitment teams, presidential/provost ambassadors programs, campus pride or traditions organizations, student allocations/student program fee committees, etc.). In the end, 10 women students participated, including a variety of majors and across academic-year levels from sophomore to senior (Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Profiles		
Name ¹	Classification	Major
Dani Smith	Senior	Social Services
Denise Jones	Senior	Economics and Pan-African Studies
Jane Johnson	Senior	Public Relations
Kimberly Morgan	Senior	Food Science Technology
Melanie Greene	Junior	Marketing
Sasha Green	Junior	Child and Family Studies
Spring Jennings	Sophomore	Marketing and International Business
Tamara Cole	5th Year Senior	Psychology
Tiffany Horton	Senior	Journalism & Electronic Media
Destiny Washington	Senior	English

To gain access to students who met the specified criteria, I contacted gatekeepers at Southeastern State University (SSU) who served in roles that advised and supported these types of organizations. Gatekeepers were the individuals who had a direct line of communication or interaction with research participants, and they were the persons or authority that provided access to research participants (Saunders, 2011). Gatekeepers were staff/faculty advisors or professional student services staff who serve in the advisory capacity to student organizations. These gatekeepers ensure that student organizations adhere to the policies established by the institution and supported students in their roles as members of student organizations. In this instance, all the gatekeepers were employees of SSU. I contacted gatekeepers via email through the institution's

¹ Names listed are pseudonyms used to protect the confidentiality of participants.

online directory. Included in the email to gatekeepers was a brief overview of my research study and participant criteria. I also asked gatekeepers to forward the email to potential participants.

To participate in my study, students had to self-identify with the criteria stated above. Included in the recruitment email was my contact information, and students were instructed to contact me via email or by phone. Once students responded to the email or contacted me by phone, I sent them a copy of the prescreening questions to ensure they met the criteria for participation. Upon confirmation that the student qualified for my study, I scheduled a face-to-face interview, which took place on the SSU campus at a mutually agreed on location. Before the interview, participants were asked again to review the informed consent form and sign a physical copy of it. After the interview, I communicated to each participant that I would contact her for a 30-minute follow-up interview. After analysis was completed, each participant was contacted for the 30-minute follow-up interview in to share data analysis for verification of accuracy and to provide any additional feedback about the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Collection

To generate appropriate and useful data, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the 10 participants (Creswell, 2014; Davis, 2012; Groenewald, 2004). The format of the interviews was in-person, face-to-face. Semi-structured interviews helped me guide the conversation and also gave me the latitude to talk with participants about interactions that were significant to their experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2016). Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was audio recorded with a digital recorder to enhance the accuracy of the data collection process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). During the interview process, data was also collected via the use of field notes (Moustakas, 1994).

The purpose of using field notes was to enhance the data collection process by constructing thick, rich descriptions of the context of this study and to document valuable contextual data shared by participants during the interview process (Moustakas, 1994; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). My field notes consisted of key words or phrases that participants used to describe or recall their experiences in predominantly White student organizations. Nonverbal communication of participants, such as facial expressions and body language, were also included in the field notes. Last, the notes included my personal thoughts and reactions to participant's recollection of their experiences and interactions in their student organization experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Analysis

In preparation for data analysis, I engaged in the process of bracketing, a process in which the focus of the research is placed in brackets; everything is set aside so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic of study and the research question (Moustakas, 1994). I made an intentional effort to set aside my preconceived notions, biases, and prejudices related to Black collegiate women's experiences in PWSOs (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing permitted me the space for new knowledge to originate from the shared experiences of my research participants (Moustakas, 1994). The specific tool that I used for bracketing was journaling (Ahern, 1999). Journaling allowed me to identify my preconceived notions about the experiences of Black women in PWSOs and provided space for me to write about and process my own feelings during the research process. Furthermore, bracketing through journaling created space for me to observe my assumptions about gender and race/ethnicity and to think about my position of privilege within power structures.

For the purpose of data analysis, I employed a modified grounded theory approach to coding my data. Adapting the use of the constant comparative method, my aim was to examine concepts and dimensions of participants lived experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) in predominantly White student organizations. The data analysis process began with open coding. Open coding supported the identification of relevant words and phrases that applied to my research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using color-coded codes, I reviewed each transcript individually to identify any initial words or phrases that were related to my research question. As a result of open coding, 39 different color-coded data codes were identified. Each data code was entered into an excel database and assigned a unique color.

Following the open coding, I moved to a higher-level coding process known as incident-to-incident coding. Incident-to-incident coding helped identify patterns of behaviors and interactions with peers that participants described from their experiences (Charmaz, 2016). Incident-to-incident coding allowed me to compare experiences or certain aspects of the participants' experiences, individually and then collectively, to the experiences of other participants. This process ensured that my phenomenon of study was the central focus of my data analyses. I considered incidents, encounters, and interactions among participants that led to similar experiences, thoughts, and ways of understanding their experiences. Incidents also included my observations of participant word choices when describing their experiences and the patterns of behavior they discussed during the interview process. When certain words or phrases were used repeatedly during an interview or by multiple participants, I recorded those words or phrases in my field notes. Incident-to-incident coding helped me narrow my initial 39 codes to 23 codes; codes that were related or similar concepts were combined.

Finally, I utilized selective coding to merge concepts into groups that helped me to build the core themes. Selective coding or focused coding helped to synthesize and organize the collection of data into more specific analytical themes (Charmaz, 2016). Selective coding required me to identify the most substantial codes that were derived in earlier stages of coding and to comb through larger data pools to move toward thematic development. I also triangulated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) the core themes with my field notes to ensure that the themes were consistent with the participants' experiences. Triangulation is the process of comparing data from multiple sources (i.e., field notes and interviews) to document the authenticity of research findings (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). Triangulation allowed me to compare data from participant interviews and field notes to strengthen the analysis and trustworthiness of my data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Selective coding, which incorporated data from open coding and incident-to-incident coding, resulted in 17 remaining codes. Codes that were similar or that overlapped with others were merged together to create five emergent themes. Finally, the core themes were juxtaposed alongside the four domains of Black women's social experience as described by BFT (Collins, 1990) . These four domains described the nature of existence and interaction between Black women and the power structures in which they exist. I also juxtaposed the lived experiences of Black women in this study through the lens of the four domains. In Chapter 4, I addressed the ways in which my four major themes connect to the theories of BFT.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is essential to the research process. When trustworthiness techniques are used, it increases the soundness of the research and researcher so that readers can trust that the research took every possible measure to produce valid and reliable research (Hesse-Biber, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, each interview was audio recorded with a digital

recorder to enhance the accuracy of data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of transcriptions. Data and interpretations were also shared with participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To further establish data trustworthiness, member checking was employed. Member checking consisted of sharing transcriptions and data analysis with participants for accuracy and consistency (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which helped to ensure that my interpretations of participants' narratives were precise and reflective of their experiences. The process of member checking entailed sharing preliminary analyses with participants to confirm that my analysis was consistent with their narratives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Upon developing the findings of the study, I shared my findings and asked for feedback from participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I also engaged in the process of bracketing by journaling. Bracketing is an intentional effort to identify and suspend all judgements or ideas about the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994; Speziale & Carpenter, 2006). Bracketing required me to temporarily set aside my prior thoughts and perspectives about my research participants and their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing was employed throughout the process of gathering and analyzing data to ensure that my personal biases, assumptions, and presuppositions did not influence the collection or analysis of data (Moustakas, 1994; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). In this case, I had to suspend what I knew about Black women's experiences in predominantly White settings to ensure that my assumptions did not alter or misrepresent the experiences of study participants. As a student affairs professional who has worked with Black women students at several PWIs, bracketing was an essential tool for me to utilize to ensure the trustworthiness of my data. I also engaged in the process of triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to coding interview transcripts, I also coded my field notes by color coding

according to common themes, and then collectively, to enhance description of data. The codes from field notes were then cross-referenced with the core themes that emerged from participant transcripts.

Informed Consent

Approval to conduct research was obtained through the University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board (IRB) by submission of an application to conduct research with human subjects. Upon approval from the University of Tennessee IRB, I began the recruitment process for participants. Students who met the criteria received an initial copy of the informed consent form via email. Prior to conducting interviews, each participant was requested to review the informed consent document and sign it. A copy of the informed consent form was made available to the participants for their records. I maintained the original copy of the consent form, which is secured in a locked file cabinet to which only I have access.

Participant Risk

While I made every reasonable effort to ensure the confidentiality of each participant, there is no guarantee of absolute privacy. Due to the interviews being digitally recorded, there was a reasonable concern for protecting the participants' identities. In an effort to maintain the participants' anonymity, each participant was given a pseudonym prior to data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The pseudonym is used in data analysis instead of the participant's name. The digital record that links each pseudonym to the participants' identity has been filed and stored on an internal hard drive that is password protected. Transcriptions are also password protected on the internal hard drive. Transcriptions were also labeled using the participant's pseudonym.

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

During the early stages of my doctoral work, I engaged in many discussions with Black women colleagues and scholars about my research topic. I wanted to know their thoughts about me, a Black male, conducting research that involved Black women. Admittedly, I was apprehensive about undertaking this study because I do not identify as a Black woman. I knew that to complete this project well, I would have to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. More specifically, I believe my hesitation was a result of my awareness that I would have to do some serious reflection and examination of my privileges and perceptions throughout the research process. I wanted to be careful to approach this study from a non-paternalistic perspective. On occasion, I was asked why I wanted to undertake this study. My reason is simply to be an advocate for Black women and other Women of Color who have to encounter gendered racism on a daily basis. Using my male privilege, I have the ability to elevate the voices of Black women in spaces where Black women's voices may be underrepresented, dismissed, or overlooked. The conversations with colleagues improved my awareness of my positionality. The conversations also gave me practical steps for ensuring the study would be authentic to the experiences of the Black women interviewed. One specific recommendation from Black women colleagues was to identify at least one faculty member to serve on my dissertation committee who identified as a Black woman. Out of the four members of my dissertation committee, two of them are Black women. My previous role as a student affairs professional allowed me to observe the unique challenges that Black women experienced academically, socially, and professionally. I had not previously considered the uniqueness of their experiences because my research focused on the experiences and challenges of Black male students. After reflecting on my professional experiences working with Black women and

reading the work of Black women scholars who were already engaged in the research, I decided that it was important to learn more and pursue this path of research.

I concur with Marshall and Rossman (2016) that my shared identity of being Black has the potential to inform my work as a researcher and that it may enlighten the way that I interpret the lived experiences of others. To account for potential bias because of my racial identity, I centered the lived experiences of my participants, and not my own, to interpret and analyze data. I could relate to some experiences based on my Blackness; however, the reality for my participants is that their lived experiences as both Black *and* woman is a completely independent lived experience (Milner, 2007). I also needed to be aware of my intersecting identities. My identities include being a Black, male, middle class, and a dual degree holder who has attended three different PWIs as a student. As a Black person, I am an insider because I share the same racial identity as the Black women students in my study (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Milner, 2007). Due to this shared identity, I might assume that I can relate to my research participants' experiences and, perhaps in some ways, that may be true. However, the reality is that my identity as a Black man brings with it a certain level of privilege that is not shared by the participants in my study. Owning my male privilege is necessary so that I can be more diligent in my advocacy for Black women. I acknowledge my privilege as a man and, therefore, reposition myself as an outsider and observer, not an expert in the experiences of the Black women in my study. This required that I utilize follow-up questions to help me accurately record the thought processes, and the interpretation of their experiences and interactions. Engaging in reflexive thinking required me to examine my thoughts about gender identity and intersecting identities. I was careful not to project my preconceptions or views about Black women's identity onto my research participants.

I attempted to manage my preconceptions by familiarizing myself with the “studied phenomenon” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 158). In this case, that phenomenon was the experiences of Black women in predominantly White student organizations. I had to maintain a level of sensitivity to the language that I used in the data analysis and writing process. I refrained from using deficit language and speculative language when describing participant experiences. I wanted to be careful that my language did not assume or draw specific conclusions unless clearly supported by the collected data (Charmaz, 2014). Aside from my identity as a Black man, my previous contribution to research and scholarship was centered on Black male collegiate experiences. Member checking helped me to limit the influence that my previous research experiences had on my interpretations of the findings in this study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter served as an overview of the research methodology that guided this study. The chapter outlined the nature of a phenomenological study and detailed the steps taken to collect and analyze data. Furthermore, in this chapter, I provided a rationale as to why phenomenology was chosen as the method of discovery for my study and outlined the measures that I employed to ensure data accuracy and trustworthiness. Finally, I discussed my positionality as a researcher and the safeguards that I employed to ensure data collection and analysis were free of personal bias.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The goal of this study was to examine Black women students' involvement experiences in predominantly White student organizations. I interviewed 10 Black women who were involved in PWSOs at Southeastern State University (SSU). Five themes emerged from the data. In this chapter, I provide a short description about each participant in the study. Subsequently, this chapter provides a detailed description of each of the five themes: *Fake Inclusion*, *Racialized Experiences*, *The "Double Minority"² Experience*, and *Be Strong, Work Harder*.

Participants

Participants in this study self-identified as Black women who were involved in at least one or more predominantly White student organizations. Several participants had been simultaneously involved in multiple PWSOs either during the time that they were interviewed, or at some point prior to being interviewed. Some participants identified with being involved in predominantly White organizational settings as high school students and for others, their first experience in PWSOs came after enrolling at SSU. Socioeconomic status was not a primary focus of this study; however, due to the positionality of the Black women in this study as college students, it is accurate to say that participants in this study are at minimum, middle-class aspiring Black women. Collins (2000) discussed the specific challenges that exist for Black women from various socioeconomic backgrounds in regards to experiencing and handling oppression in US social institutions. While some participants might have grown-up in low socioeconomic or working class environments, enrolling in a four-year institution meant that participants encountered, "a distinctive set of challenges in thinking through this new social context so

² The use of the term minority reflects the original verbiage of participants in this study.

profoundly restructured by class' (Collins, 2000, p. 67). Such challenges are evidenced in the experiences of some of the Black women in this study.

Dani Smith is a senior majoring in social services. Dani is a member of a historically Black sorority, the Black student alliance at SSU, and a peer mentor with a campus mentoring organization. Her involvement in predominantly White student organizations consisted of being an ambassador for her college and a member of the academic college student organization in which she was the diversity representative.

Denise Jones has been involved in the honors program at SSU since her first year. Denise dual-majored in economics and Pan-African studies. Denise is also a member of a historically Black sorority and plans to attend law school after she graduates. She is involved in a campus leadership and service organization and her college's honors student association. Denise formerly identified as an activist; however, she has had to minimize her activism to focus more on her academics and for personal reasons.

Destiny Washington is a former writer for SSU's student newspaper. Formerly, a journalism major, Destiny will graduate with a degree in English. During her time at SSU, she was involved in the student government association as a senator for her college and the campus news channel. She is a recent initiate of a historically Black sorority on campus.

Jane Johnson is a senior, public relations major with a minor in business. Jane is a member of a campus business fraternity and the African American programming council. Jane was also the only Person of Color involved in the sexual health education program at SSU. During her time at SSU, she was able to intern with the local United Way and a local mental health clinic.

Kimberly Morgan is a food biology major with extensive involvement experience at SSU. She is a senior and has been involved in the campus chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Kimberly is a member of a dance company that consists primarily of Black women, and she is also a member of a historically Black sorority.

Melanie Greene is a junior majoring in marketing. She is member of a fashion and design organization at SSU, and she holds a leadership position in a campus business fraternity. Melanie is also an ambassador for her academic college and a peer mentor in a campus mentoring program that she was once a mentee as a first-year student.

Sasha Green is a child development major, with a minor in Spanish. She is a former residence hall assistant and a leader with a campus Christian ministry organization. Sasha also participated in the Black gospel choir at SSU. An avid dancer, Sasha's involvement on campus also involves being a member of the largest dance company, of which she was one of two Black women in the organization.

Spring Jennings is a sophomore at SSU majoring in international business and marketing. She grew up in a local suburb near SSU and is an honors student. Her involvement includes a campus business fraternity and a college ambassador program. She is a leader in a campus leadership program for first-year students.

Tamara Cole is a fifth-year senior at SSU majoring in psychology, with a pre-medicine concentration. She has been involved with the student government association since she was a first-year student. She is involved in the NAACP chapter on campus and has previously been an SSU orientation leader.

Tiffany Horton is a senior and will graduate with a bachelor's degree in journalism and electronic media. She has been very involved during her time at SSU. Her previous involvement

in campus activism resulted in her isolating herself for a brief period of time to focus more on her academics and work. Tiffany is a member of a historically Black sorority and a former residence hall assistant. She also served on the diversity committee with the student government association and participated in a leadership development program when she was a sophomore.

Exclusion

The first theme that emerged from participants' experiences was exclusion. Participants were often the only Black women or one of a few Black women within their student organization. The lack of representation of Black women in these organizations communicated to the participants that their presence was unwanted in those spaces. Participants often felt undervalued, isolated, and excluded by White members in the organization. Despite being selected or appointed to participate in these organizations, participants felt as if their presence within the organizations was unwelcome.

Spring Jennings, a sophomore majoring in marketing and international business, was involved in one of the largest business fraternities on campus, the ambassador program in her college, and the campus' honors program. Reflecting about her involvement experience in the business fraternity and how it has shaped her identity, she remembered:

I would say, race and gender has shaped my experience because I think it comes down to almost a lack of confidence and not necessarily seeing people that look like me in those positions; and so, not thinking that I either deserve to be there or that I should be in these positions sometimes.

The underrepresentation of Black women overall and within positions of leadership in the organization sent the message to Spring that she was not welcome or valued in the organization.

Tiffany Horton, a senior majoring in journalism and electronic media at SSU, recalled a similar feeling during her sophomore year when she was a residence hall assistant:

Yeah. And I really didn't feel like I fit in with my staff that much, and I didn't feel like I fit in with what they [White residents] were talking about. So, things that they found interesting and things that they really thought was the right way to go about things, I only related to the other Black people on my staff.

Denise Jones, a graduating senior who majored in economics and African studies, shared similar feelings of not fitting in or feeling excluded. When she was a first-year student, Denise remembered being the only Black woman involved in the University Honors Program (UHP). She not only felt excluded because she was the only Black student involved in the organization, but of the women in the group, she was the only Woman of Color.

I'm the only Black woman, and that hasn't changed... And then, there were also five women out of 15 and so a lot of times, especially my first-year, I got left out; especially with the other women because they're all White. They also roomed together in a four-person suite our first year, so I was left out of that group. I never really felt connected to any of the girls in the program.

Melanie Greene, a junior marketing major, was a member of Delta Phi Epsilon (DPE) business fraternity and the International Business Association (IBA). Melanie recalled learning about IBA at a student organization fair. Because she was minoring in business, it seemed like a good organization to join. After attending several meetings, Melanie decided to end her involvement. She recalled that "after attending a couple of meetings I didn't feel included or I felt like out of place, so I discontinued my involvement there." When probed further about the nature of her leaving the organization, she responded:

The reason why I dropped out like I said before is because I felt out of place. I didn't feel a part, and it was a student-led organization. So, there was no ...or at least I didn't know who would be [the] faculty advisor. So, I took it upon myself to remove myself in that situation.

Denise shared a similar experience from her sophomore year at SSU. It was her first year participating in the Community Leaders Network Organization (CLNO), a two-year leadership development opportunity for SSU students. When speaking about the challenges that she encountered with CLNO, she stated:

Just not feeling like I fit in, or that I can connect with anyone on a personal level. Or, because of that, feeling like I'm inadequate sometimes, or that I can't meet up to the standards. So, yeah, there were some challenges.

Dani Smith, a senior social services major, was involved in both academic and social organizations. For her, exclusion meant that she was not fully permitted to be involved in creating or shifting the culture of her student organization. She also felt that she could not fully engage in the process of decision making within the organization. She recalled how she rejected the offer to become the president of an organization because of the exclusion she felt as a member. She re-counted:

I was the diversity representative for two years, and in my senior year they asked me to be president, and I said no, because I wasn't going to continue my membership with the Social Services Student Organization (SSSO), because I didn't want to be part of an organization where I wasn't going to be able to use my voice fully.

Sasha Green, a junior child development major, expressed frustration about being underrepresented in student organization settings. Reflecting on the lack of diversity in her

student organization, she explained that “it's predominantly White. I could count on both hands how many Black students we have.” There were certain organizations where more diverse representation was expected based upon the mission of the organization.

Tamara Cole, a fifth-year senior majoring in psychology was involved in the student government organization (SGO). She assumed that her experience with the SGO would be different:

Honestly? It's not as diverse as I'd expect it to be, but I will say that the past years, it's been a lot worse, like when I step into a room, of course I'm looking. I've been serving in SGO since my freshman (sic) year, and the first year that I served there, the racial makeup was awful. I would walk into a room and I think there'd be maybe three other students that looked like me, and probably maybe one, maybe two people who are from a different cultural background, as well.

Denise remembered beginning CLNO as one of four Black women, but after several months of involvement, two other Black women decided they would not continue their involvement:

There were four, and two dropped out the first year of the program specifically because they thought that it wasn't welcoming to minority(sic) students [Students of Color]. They do this thing where they pair us with a community mentor, and so, sometimes that can be a disconnect because they tend to find people who are not involved in what you're involved in, I guess. And then also, they're [White]. So, [Black] students had concerns that they weren't going out of their way to find people who were minorities (sic) who could also mentor minorities.

Kimberly Morgan, a food biology major, shared a similar experience while she was involved with the Homecoming Celebration Team (HCT) during her sophomore year. She recalled:

There probably were five or four Black people when I did it, and I don't wanna say I didn't feel like I didn't have a voice, but at the same time, I didn't because I was over the homecoming court, which we no longer do anymore. But I was over that, and it's like they [all White Campus Activities Board] already had a set plan of what they wanted, but they kind of made us go through extra loopholes just to get back to what they already knew that they wanted.

Tiffany had a similar encounter to the one that Kimberly referenced. That experience led her to remove herself from participating in an organization in which she had invested a significant amount of time:

I just stopped, my senior year. Because I just felt like I wasn't super appreciated, I wasn't valued and I didn't have anybody to really connect with... And I was like, I need to take time for myself because it was too much time for people who literally don't do anything for me.

Spring recounted her experience not feeling valued by peers in DPE and the International Leaders Society (ILS). She explained:

But then there are organizations where I don't necessarily feel as valued, I would say. And that being primarily DPE and the ILS. I think the ILS is getting there, and they are trying, but I also, I think what they lack is not necessarily asking or receiving Students of Color input as much.

Tamara spoke about the invisibility that she felt during her involvement. She described why it took her so long to step into a leadership role within SGO:

It's kind of a mixture... I've maintained my involvement in SGO, but I've struggled to kind of make myself enjoy it. Mainly because I don't feel like my presence is valued or even necessary at times. It's kind of just like one of those things like if I'm not there, I don't think anyone would notice. So, you know, in previous years I don't think that I had that platform or that support to step into a role of leadership; whereas now, I felt like this was the perfect opportunity, 'cause I somewhat have control over how students can perceive campus.

Participants revealed the realities of their existence as Black women in PWSOs as one of being a part of the organization but excluded from being able to access the full benefit of their membership. Even though participants had successfully completed the recruitment process in their organizations, their identity as Black women meant that they often felt undervalued and excluded, even in leadership roles.

Fake Inclusion

The second theme that emerged from the data was participants' experiences with *Fake Inclusion*. In addition to wrestling with feelings of being undervalued, isolated, and excluded, participants often heard White members voice concerns about wanting to do more in terms of diversity and inclusion in their organizations. However, when opportunities to engage in conversations about more diverse representation and more inclusive practices arose, they were often met with hesitation, or the conversations happened when it was too late to take action.

Spring recalled a moment when a White male member of her fraternity spoke up about electing more Students of Color for the executive board. She recalled:

During that meeting, one of the things that was brought up by a White guy was the lack of diversity on the exec board we had just elected for all of our positions. This was a nine-exec position board and he was saying we just elected an all-white exec. I'm glad he brought that up, but he was one of the few people that ran against someone of color.

White members in the organization had previously expressed a desire for organizations to be more diverse and inclusive, and some considered themselves to be allies. Yet, their attempts often fell short of addressing the larger and more complex issues that were at the root of the diversity and inclusion problems. Due to the lack of representation of Black women on executive boards, their voices were missing from discussions about nominations and appointments to the executive board. Destiny Washington, a senior majoring in English, encountered *Fake Inclusion* during her involvement as a member of the Student Newspaper Association (SNA). Destiny thought that being a columnist would give her a voice to speak about issues that affected Students of Color on campus; however, she remembered feeling censored by the editor because of the topics that she decided to write about. She recounted:

So with SNA, I actually ended up ... I enjoyed my time there, but I stopped writing for them because I had an editorial column that was based on multicultural students... a lot of my opinions that I would have sometimes would get stripped out, but they would be common amongst my community. Or the way that it would be edited would turn what I originally said into something completely different. I stopped writing for SNA after I realized that a lot of my content that I was creating around my topic of multicultural student life and the issues around campus that were affecting us were being misconstrued or edited to a form where it took away the original message that was being said.

Jane Johnson, a senior public relations major, also acknowledged the difficulty she and other Students of Color in DPE would have when conversations about diversity and race would come up during organization events:

When we did, it was kind of watered down... can we talk about the [real] issue? Can we talk about how when I raise my voice a little bit, like White people, like the White women get afraid, even though I'm a very soft-spoken person. Can we talk about like what that does to us [other Black women]?

When probed further about her experience within SGO and how that experience differed or mirrored her overall experience with the racial climate at SSU, Jane asserted:

I think it's about the same. In SGO they do a really great job of saying that they hear you out and they're listening and they're accepting what you're saying, but within any decision that is made, they completely disregard anything that you say, so I just come to learn that's kind of what it's like on campus, too. You know, everyone wants to say that they're advocates for diversity. They're trying do everything that they can to make every student feel accepted and this, that, and the third. But within my experience anyways, I felt a lot of people just like smile in my face and you know... try and sell me the idea that that's what they're doing.

Spring suggested that DPE members talked a good game when it came to diversity but that they often fell short of real action and organizational change. She stated in reference to the perceived value of diversity among members in the organization:

Yeah, I would say, I wouldn't say it's necessarily valued, but I just kind of feel sometimes, especially with DPE, they always say, "Oh we've got such diversity," when

really there is only ten of us, in the 200-person organization and to me that is not what diversity represents.

Throughout participants' involvement in predominantly White student organizations, they encountered "lip service" diversity efforts, which were a result of only espoused attempts toward progress, instead of meaningful action and change. The structural and organizational effects of dominant, White, patriarchal culture meant that the Black women in this study constantly encountered fake inclusion. Participants had a desire to be involved in their organizations and contribute in meaningful ways; however, several participants shared the disappointment that they felt as a result of the fake inclusion that they encountered.

Fake Inclusion via Tokenism

A common result or consequence of participants' collision with fake inclusion was tokenism. Instead of seeing authentic efforts to make organizations more diverse among their membership and within leadership positions, participants instead observed and experienced tokenism.

Tiffany, revisited her experience in a student-athletic recruiting organization in which she was one of several Black women in the organization:

It felt like I was a token child or a poster child for those things. Especially for the recruitment team. I feel like they just wanted the Black girls to be there...to be like for show. And they had to be attractive Black girls, they just wouldn't let anybody on the team. But it just felt like I was there to push an agenda, not necessarily there because I deserved to be. Or not like I had a place in that organization or they genuinely wanted me to be there. I feel like everything was just a hidden agenda.

Jane discussed the lack of representation of Black women in the DPE. Out of the more than 200 members in the business fraternity, she recalled only nine other Black women in the organization. After she finished the membership intake process, Jane noticed the racial dynamics at play in the organization, recalling:

After I pledged and became a [member], it became a little rocky because I was a part of voting for people on eboard, but we could tell that there was a lot of, there was a lot, not intentional racism. It wasn't blatant, but it was like people would not vote for Black people to be on eboard. Like they'll try having at least one Black person on eboard and that's it. Like no more than one Person of Color.

Jane also recalled vocalizing her concern about tokenism and the racial bias that she thought was at play when it came to identifying Black student members for leadership positions in the organization:

When it came to voting for other positions that weren't technically like eboard, but still leadership positions like pledge parent, they didn't really pick People of Color, no matter how qualified they were. There were so many people who were super qualified, but they weren't picked. We kind of saw a trend of that, and we would speak out during the meetings.

In reflecting on her experience with being the only Black woman in many of her student involvement experiences, Spring concluded:

So being the only, usually the only Black female in a lot of these organizations, it's definitely something that I am very aware of... I often feel, I really feel the effects of tokenism. I feel that I could be falling into that, as if that's the only reason why I can be a

part of this program is because they want to boast diversity. So they, they recruit me along.

Melani reflected on her experience being tokenized as well:

There have been times that I am put on the spot or placed on a pedestal to be the spokesperson for what it means to be Black or to be a Black woman – from talking about curly hair or tanning or physical things.

Dani recalled her thought process when she decided to not join a predominantly White sorority and opted to be a member of a historically Black sorority:

Even with my sorority, I didn't want to be the token Black person in a White sorority, or the Panhellenic sororities. I didn't want to just help to meet a quota or something, I wanted to be a member, and be a part of something that understood my culture, and understood my background, and things of that nature.

Participants observed that tokenism resulted in hopeful ambitions regarding diversity and inclusion efforts but never truly resulted in opportunities for real change. *Fake inclusion* became a place holder for progressive action and truly inclusive spaces for Black women.

Gendered Racial Experiences

The third theme that emerged from participants' narratives were the consequences of encounters with expectations about who they were and who others expected them to be as Black woman. Before participants could express themselves as unique individuals, they were bombarded with misconceptions and stereotypes from their White peers. Participants discussed interactions with White peers who expected them to act out their Blackness based upon their own stereotypical assumptions of Black women. Participants also spoke of incidents with gendered racial microaggressions within student organization settings.

Melanie reflected on her experience being in a leadership role in the organization; and realizing that other members were inappropriately going around her to handle organizational business:

And then when I became a chair, I then took on those responsibilities. And I started gaining respect, people had to come to me to ask a question or had to come to me with their ideas. I felt like I was getting my foot in with the organization, I was getting their respect. But even still there were some times where people over-stepped or went around me. Whether it was a genuine, "It's because you're Black," kind of thing or not, there were times that I did feel like my race was an issue.

Spring articulated her struggle to respond appropriately to White peers when something was said that she perceived to be inappropriate during meetings. Her response highlighted the tension that Black women contend with when there is not a critical mass of them represented in a particular context. The tension of being seen as a representative of all people who look like them. Spring recounted:

And while a part of me wanted to challenge that, I wanna be an individual person, I wanna be myself, but at the same time, I know that in a lot of ways I can't be that person that reaffirms the stereotypes, that reaffirms a certain type of action.

Spring's experience revealed the conflicting nature of being a Black woman and wanting to be authentic while at the same time acknowledging the reality that her behaviors and interactions would potentially contribute to the narrative of all Black women.

Tiffany recalled a similar encounter in the residence hall when she had to enact self-restraint to prevent herself from responding in a way that would have been viewed as a stereotypical response from a Black woman:

I think for a RA it was very difficult simply because it was me and Jessica [another Black woman RA], we were the only two, and I know that I try really hard not to come off as like the Black woman who has like all this to say or gives attitude and everything. Like a lot of people do stuff for money and I just wasn't about to let my mental health take the toll because I wanted to be an RA. So I let that one go.

Tiffany eventually decided that she would no longer be an RA because the stress was overwhelming for her.

Kimberly also felt this tension during her involvement with the Homecoming Celebration Committee. She felt that she had to operate at a higher standard to avoid fulfilling the stereotypical perceptions of her peers.

[I] kind of put it [my Blackness] off to the corner because I didn't wanna seem this way, 'cause I didn't want people to say, "Oh, Black women are this, just because they saw me do something."

When prodded for more detail, Kim confessed:

When I am around White people, for instance, I talk more "properly" but I guess that [was] me not wanting to be viewed as an ignorant Black girl. When I'm casually talking and being me, and not trying to seem ignorant. But this is just me using the Ebonics that I use at home. But I felt like I just had to carry myself to a higher standard.

Kim's gendered racial experiences were the result of misconceptions about her identity shaped by interactions with her White peers. Yet, she also spoke of how she was perceived differently in comparison to another Black woman who was also involved in the organization. When asked about her thoughts regarding the difference in acceptance between the two of them, she responded:

Okay. I would just say, not saying she was less Black than me, but in a sense, she ... I'm really in tune with my Blackness, not saying she's not, I don't know. No, maybe they were, I don't want to say intimidated, but maybe they just viewed me as being that typical Black woman. Does that make sense?

Kim wrestled with being her authentic self in a student organization that she perceived as only embracing Black women who hid their Blackness.

Dani detailed how she was misperceived by a White male peer in an acapella group that she co-founded. She was perceived as being unapproachable or aggressive when she asserted herself in her leadership role:

Throughout me being involved, there have always been times where people have said that they've been scared of me, or they've found me very intimidating, and things like that, and I honestly feel like I've just presented myself as a very serious person. We have business to do, let's take care of business. I've personally had those conversations with people, and they've never had solid reasons for why they've found me intimidating, or why they've found me scary. It's like, I'm not that big. I weigh maybe a hundred-ish pounds. These are guys that are like six-foot-tall, that all I could ever do to them was say something to them, and I don't understand where that fear or hesitation came from.

Dani's encounter provides some context to the stereotypes that are ascribed to Black women.

Tiffany reflected on her experience as a resident hall assistant and the awkwardness that would ensue when she used her voice to address issues that came up in conversations among her residents. She remembered:

And I feel like I had to tiptoe around a lot of people or act like I was okay around them and stuff like that. Because people would get mad at me for speaking out. I know one girl

tried to touch my hair and I just told her not to, and I wasn't being rude about it, I was just like, "don't."

Tiffany articulated how she felt pressured to suppress her emotions out of fear of being stereotyped or mislabeled as an angry Black woman. Tamara assumed that once she had been elected to a leadership position in SGO it would garner her more respect. However, she realized that her thoughts and ideas were often disregarded in group conversations because of her race and gender. She recalled the emotional toll it took on her when she realized what was happening:

But at the end of the day it's like what do you do [because] what I provide almost feels like it's always disregarded. It almost took a toll on me when I started to realize that it was literally just because it was coming out of my [a Black woman's] mouth. Like someone else could say it of a different race and everyone would love their idea. And it was my idea that I had initially presented. So, it kind of sucks but that's kind of just like the atmosphere that I've become accustomed to.

The gendered racial experiences of the Black women in this study were not overt instances of gendered racism but the perpetual nature of them were overwhelming for participants. For instance, Spring recalled one specific experience with gendered racial microaggressions:

I would say, again most of the times it hasn't been overt things people have done, like using derogatory terms. But it's more of like microaggressions that people would say. The number of times I've gotten, oh you're pretty for a Black girl, like those types of comments that while they don't...I just think people don't understand like what they are really saying.

Sasha equated her involvement in a PWSOs to that of being a visitor in someone else's home. In her opinion, this feeling was the result of her intersecting identities as a Black woman.

She stated:

I think because of my race and because of my gender, I feel like I'm a visitor... I think over time, I felt less and less like a part of SSU. I guess the more I learned the people here, and the more I learned who my leaders are and what they stand for. I feel like I was meant to be here, I'm supposed to be here, but sometimes I don't have that school pride that some people do.

Sasha's perspective revealed the influence that gendered racism has on students sense of belonging on college campuses. Over time, the sense of pride or sense of belonging that Sasha had developed for SSU eroded because of ongoing gendered racism she experienced and the racism that she observed happening on the campus.

Similar to Sasha, Denise also reflected on the intersection of her identities in her predominantly White student organization. She also situated her experience within the context of being a Black woman at a large predominantly White institution.

Being a Black woman at SSU is a really difficult place because of those intersecting identities. So, it's like, obviously Black students aren't represented as much on campus, and I guess our place isn't respected. But also, being a woman, sometimes women aren't respected on this campus as well. It's very White-male dominated, so that's kind of difficult.

Denise's account of being a Black women at SSU revealed the reality of Black women being underrepresented on the campus and their identities not being respected by those in positions of power and influence. Kim addressed the complexity of being a Black woman

involved in multicultural or ethnic-specific student organizations, while simultaneously seeking membership in predominantly White student organizations. Her experience exposes the existence of gendered racism during the recruitment process of predominantly White student organizations. Kim recalled how her leadership accomplishments in multicultural or ethnic-specific student organizations were treated as subpar:

You can be in all these great organizations in the Black community, but in a sense, it doesn't mean much to the larger community. Because I guess they just still don't see it as good, until you're in a predominantly White organization and you're holding those leadership positions. 'Cause you'll tell somebody, "Hey, I'm in so-and-so of these predominantly Black organizations" and they'll be like, "Oh, okay." But then you'll tell them, "Oh, I'm this in this predominantly White organization" and they're like, "Oh, wow, you a Black person? You got that? Wow!"

Denise shared a similar sentiment regarding how her leadership experiences in ethnic-specific student organizations were devalued.

There are these, I guess, elite organizations on campus that people say that everyone should be involved in. So, student government [organization], which is majority White, and student alumni club, and things like that. When you're [a Black student] going out and applying to a lot of these other organizations saying that I am involved in these Black organizations, it isn't looked at the same way.

The gendered racial experiences of participants varied. Some of the participants told stories of being constantly confronted with gendered racial microaggressions, while others spoke of more intermittent interactions with the gendered racial stereotypes of peers. The collective effect of these experiences presented barriers for the participants to be their authentic selves in

the organizations. Some participants spoke of how important relationships with other Black students were within predominantly White student organizations. Spring reflected about her relationships with Black peers in DPE as she recalled, “I actively look for them in a crowd, because it makes me feel more comfortable or more myself to be around them.” Having a small community of other Black students that they could relate to within organizations provided a space where they could be themselves and escape from the uncomfortableness of being isolated and stereotyped.

The “Double-Minority” Experience

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was participants’ awareness of the duality of their identity. While these Black women always carried with them their Blackness and their womanhood, there were specific moments within their experiences when they were particularly conscious of their intersecting identities. In addition to the consciousness of their dual identities, they also had an acute awareness of the apparent consequences of their dual identity. When some participants decided to speak up about issues they were concerned about or when they responded to an inappropriate comment, they were also mindful of the criticism that would follow. Jane shared her frustration about the consequences of being a Black woman when addressing the insensitive actions and comments of her White peers:

I shouldn't have to feel like excluded or that I don't want people to think I'm loud or anything, even though I'm soft spoken. I don't want people to think that my [Black women] peers are disrespectful or just not intelligent because of their [White people] reaction to what you do and stuff.

Sasha spoke of the consequences of being a Black woman when she was an RA. She made it a point to identify as a Black woman to her residents:

I think some of my residents may have had preconceived notions of me being this mad Black woman. I think they had that notion already made about me, because I was very vocal about who I was and what I identify with.

Sasha was intentional about acknowledging her dual identity as Black and woman with her White residents, hoping that by doing so her identity would not be a barrier to developing relationships with them:

I think as an RA, as a Black female who's heterosexual and Christian, I think some of my residents may have had preconceived notions of me being this mad, Black, church-going woman. I think they had that notion already made about me, because I was very vocal about who I was and what I identify with.

Sasha thought that if she was more proactive about acknowledging her identity, it would eliminate potential barriers that might exist between her and her White residents. She recalled, “It was just like in the beginning I made it known to them like, yes, I know I'm a Black female, but I don't want you all to see me as somebody who's different from you.”

For Melanie, knowing that there were people who did not expect her to succeed, provided her with motivation to set and accomplish goals. She also admitted that the pressure to succeed was taxing because she knew there were people who wanted to see her fail:

I think being a Black woman has made me more ambitious. Being a double minority so to speak. I feel like I have to work harder to prove myself especially in the place of business because women in general are seen as lesser in a business setting, and to put on top of that I am Black. So, I am more ambitious to accomplish the things that I pursue because there's something that I have to prove being who I am.

For Dani, the duality of being a Black woman in a student organization that was dominated by White women meant that she was often conscious of the intersecting nature of her identity and the identity of other Women of Color. She remembered having to be a voice for diversity among her peers:

With SSSO in general, I feel like me being a woman was more of a thing that was prevalent, than me being a Black woman because so many of the people in the organization and in the college, were women. And mostly White women. When it came to things like feminism, the room was very much like, “Yes, these are things that are important, that must be talked about.” But there wasn't a lot of intersectionality when it came to talking about the different types of women.

Because the organization was dominated by White women, Dani knew that she was the only member who was thinking about the intersection of race in those conversations. Therefore, she had to be the individual to ensure that race was not forgotten in such conversations.

The lived experiences of Black women in this study characterized the individual uniqueness of their essence and simultaneously, the collective phenomenon of being a Black woman in a predominantly White student organization. Some participants, such as Spring, were used to being in predominantly White organizational spaces because she went to a predominantly White high school and was the only Black woman in her AP courses.

Growing up the way I did, I have really good relationships with a lot of my White peers... And it was a trend that kind of continued in high school. I was really very comfortable with being a minority in all situations, even though I did not realize it.

On the contrary, there were other participants, such as Dani, who grew up in a predominantly Black environment. Dani recalled what it was like for her when she arrived at SSU:

Coming from [my hometown] to a predominantly White institution was a culture shock for me. Just because in [my hometown] you have White people, but the White people seem to get what being Black is a little bit more... they're a bit more aware that there's a spectrum to being Black, and that there are Black people who do all sorts of different things.

It did not make a difference if participants were used to being the only, or one of a few Black women or People of Color in a particular setting; or that they came from an environment that was predominantly Black or more culturally diverse. The result of feeling like a “double minority” was the similar for participants.

Spring similar feeling as she reflected on being conscious of her Blackness and her identity as a woman:

I feel like for me, it's both all the time, because I can't really separate my race from my gender. Like my intersectionality is who I am, being a Black female all the time. Like I can't just be Black and I just can't be a female. I'm constantly those two things and so, and that's what people see when they first look at me. Not just a female and not just someone who is Black, like a Black female in today's society. And so, I think I'm constantly aware of my race and gender together.

Existing as a Black woman in PWSOs meant for participants, that if there was not another Black woman in the organization, there was not another individual who could relate to the challenges they encountered. Black men could possibly relate to their racialized experiences but not to the duality of their race and gender. White women could potentially comprehend the dynamics of being a woman in a male-dominated student organization, yet they would not understand the compounding nature of being a woman and Black.

Spring summarized what it meant to function as a Black woman in predominantly White organizations, asserting that “my identity is really wrapped up in that [intersectionality] because I face two different type of oppressions.” One aspect of Black women’s existence was the continuous use of code-switching. When they were in predominantly White environments they opted to use standard English in conversations and interactions. Opposed to using more casual vernacular or slang when they were among Black peers.

There was not one specific strategy that the Black women in this study used to resist the oppressive nature of the environments they occupied. Some participants relied heavily on relationships with other Black students that existed within ethnic-specific organizations. Tamara expressed her approach to resisting when she observed that “whenever I feel like I'm not supported, I go to the organizations where I know that I do feel supported.” Other participants worked hard to gain influence in their organization and use their influence to affect change. Some Black women felt that the best way for them to protect their mental and emotional health was for them to devote their time to other organizations where their identity as a Black woman was affirmed. Then there were other Black women in this study that invested significant time in their organizations despite the barriers that they experienced, while others decided that it would be best if they removed themselves completely from these organizations. These experiences included stories of triumph and in some cases moments of defeat. Tamara spoke of how her involvement in PWSOs shaped her development and influenced her perspective about life after college:

It has shaped my character. So I don't think that it's anything that I'm concerned about because it's preparing me for what is in the real world. So once I leave here I'm not going to be stressed or surprised or concerned with any of the treatment that I may experience.

I've had this experience here at SSU, which ultimately is what I really, really feel like the real world is like for an African American woman.

Tamara viewed her experience at SSU as preparation for what she would encounter upon transitioning into the workforce. Kimberly summed up what it was like to be a Black woman with ambition and a desire to make a difference in predominantly White student organizations. She called it, “that double minority” thing:

That's just what it seems like to me. Yeah, all people don't think the same, obviously, but that's just what it looks like from my perspective. It really sucks because it's that double minority thing. But we still have to work hard and just be okay with ourselves as Black women and not lean so much on what other people's views and perspectives on life are. Because if we do that, then we're gonna be forever competing against ourselves, really. That's just what I think about that.

The summation of these Black women’s experiences drew them to a space of double consciousness, conscious about the role that racism and gendered racism played in how Black students and other Students of Color experienced involvement in PWSOs and at the same time conscious of the function that gendered racism has on how Women of Color experience involvement in predominantly White student organizational structures. Their accounts of their intersected existence revealed the complexity of their identity as Black and as women.

Be Strong, Work Harder

The final theme that emerged from the data was the product of Black women’s ability to remain focused on their goals regardless of the gendered racism they encountered. *Be Strong, Work Harder* describes the overwhelming expectations and pressure that were placed upon them to compete and outwork their White peers. Some participants described the external pressure

they encountered from Black peers to “be great.” Others revealed an internal pressure which demanded that they persevere through their obstacles. There was also a collective consensus among participants that there were implicit expectations about their ability to be strong and to be hard workers. Their ability to perform well had implications for themselves and for the Black women that would succeed them. Aside from the emotionally draining encounters these Black women encountered, several of them pointed to a stronger sense of self-identity and self-confidence as an outcome of their experiences.

Denise conjectured that being involved in two PWSOs was both challenging and rewarding. Despite the barriers that were presented to her, she recalled feeling that she had become better because of them. She explained:

It led to my development. I think that it let me have a stronger sense of identity. Even though it was challenging, it helped me to find myself and to stand firm in who I am and what I am, regardless of what was going on with everyone else.

Now a senior, Denise recalled the pressure of being the only Black woman in UHP during her first year:

It was a lot of pressure because I felt like my participation, my identity in that would influence them choosing other people that were of the same race and gender. So, now in UHP there are a few more Black women that there weren't there before. I kind of felt like I had to represent and be strong in that so I could set an example so they could see that these people belong here.

Denise's perspective depicts the extreme pressure that exists for Black women in predominantly White student organizations. The pressure to not just be a representative for other Black women.

But is also depicts the symbolic nature that her existence represents. Which meant that she had to work hard for herself and for those who would come after her.

Jane also felt the pressure of having to be better and work harder than those around her. She expressed how she had to work harder to feel, or at least portray that she was 'being great' in the eyes of her peers:

To me personally, it meant that I kind of had to do better than everybody else. Like I had to work harder and I didn't want to stress myself out, but that was a pressure I felt personally. Like I had to get the most internships, I had to stand out and I had to pick up a leadership position because there were so few of us and I had to represent. It wasn't a lot of pressure from my White peers, but from my Black peers.

When asked about what it meant to be a Black woman involved at SSU, Destiny replied, "it means staying intact at all cost." In her mind, the desire that she possessed to achieve her goals outweighed "the nonsense" that she had to experience and it made her work harder to achieve her goals.

Likewise, Tamara articulated that being able to overcome the barriers she encountered helped her to realize her potential:

It helped me realize that I can do it... despite the connotation that people typically have of African American people and African American women... I feel like it has helped me push myself a whole lot harder to know, okay, I have these people to prove wrong. I can do this. I can do a pretty great job at it and I can give them something to remember me by and not only me by, but also paving the road for the young ladies and the other African American people who are coming after me. So that people can learn to give us a chance and know that race has nothing to do with how you present yourself. It has nothing to do

with the ideas and investments that you can make within an organization. It definitely pushed me to step out of that comfort zone and to break that barrier and break that stereotype that people had.

Tamara's awareness of the stereotypes that her White peers thrust upon her meant that she had to work hard to overcome them and prove them wrong. She revealed:

I feel like my race has influenced my development pretty much by teaching me that I have to work a little bit harder than the average person has to. Or like, a little bit harder than someone of a different race has to because of the stereotypes, like I said before, that are already placed on my race. So accepting that and learning to challenge it has definitely shaped me and developed me as a person. 'Cause typically I grew up in an area where everyone looked just like me. So I never really had to push myself to step out of any comfort zones or I never had to worry about competing and being unfairly treated because of my race.

Tamara further articulated what it meant to be a Black woman navigating predominantly White spaces:

To be a Black woman at SSU means to me, being literally at the bottom of the barrel because... being African American [is] kind of hard; but being an African American woman... they [are] really not going to think that I can do anything, so I definitely have to work just a little bit harder.

Spring disclosed feeling the burden to overcome stereotypes not only for herself but for others that would succeed her. Several of the participants referenced a sense of being trailblazers for Black women that would follow them. She stated powerfully:

Because then people can't read into that and say this is how all Black women are. They are such and such; therefore we shouldn't hire them. We shouldn't promote them. We shouldn't have them in these high levels because of something that I did. So, it's like I'm almost not only concerned about my own well-being, but the well-being of any Black woman that [has] to come after me and knowing that I laid the foundation. Like we are capable, we are strong, and we are gonna get our work done. And not have that being anything that limits our, I guess, our achievement.

Developing “thick skin” became a survival skill for the Black women in this study. Dani recalled when she first realized how different the environment was at SSU compared to where she previously lived. She stated, “but when I came [to SSU], it was like this sudden ... I was being stereotyped, and I didn't realize how real those stereotypes [were] until I got out of [my hometown].”

For Tamara, it meant that she had to have “thick skin” if she wanted to survive the gendered racism she encountered. She recalled, “my experiences kind of just shaped me and taught me how to approach certain situations with a different mentality. Just like, I developed a lot of ‘tough skin’ because of it.”

Dani expressed the necessity to be “creative” in her existence. Which meant that if she wanted to be involved, she had to learn how to navigate and adapt in a variety of settings that were often predominantly White:

To be a Black woman means you have to come in strong. I feel like you have to learn who you are, and be a lot surer of yourself faster than most people in college might have to. Just because you'll be challenged more often for your different identities. What it means, is to be strong in whatever way you think being strong means, and it's also being

creative in existing in all these different spaces that we go into, and mastering the art of code switching.

Melanie profoundly articulated what it meant to be a Black woman navigating predominantly White student organizations:

I think the essence of a Black woman is strength and by that, I mean a lot of times here at this school... And it takes strength and it takes self-control to be able to keep my composure in a professional setting or to even make friends that are not Black and to make associations. So definitely strength and self-control.

Tamara highlighted her motivation for remaining involved amidst the ongoing battle of having to prove herself. She pinpointed her success as a method to uplift other Black women on campus who thought of her as a role model:

What motivates me is knowing that there is someone that is looking at me and watching me and seeing that if I'm capable of doing it, they can and that change doesn't stop with me or it doesn't have to stop with what I'm doing. So just because I feel like I'm struggling now, knowing that there are people coming after me that are going to continue whatever efforts I began and they're going to finish the job better than I ever could have. So definitely knowing that I have people that look at me and they're rooting me on and they're definitely hoping and almost looking at me as a role model and hoping that within the challenges that I face, I'm going to come out strong and successful and that in itself pushes me to continue to stay involved.

Jane's assessment of existing as a Black woman in PWSOs encompassed the intricacy and uniqueness of Black women's intersecting identities.

Black women at SSU... they have a presence. They're always doing something big. At SSU if you're not Black you kind of get lost in the mix. But Black women have their own flavor. I kind of felt like I was pressured to leave my mark. I feel like I did well. I was in organizations, I made good grades, I made great friendships but I also felt like I stood out. I had to be great... Yeah, we definitely have a presence. I also feel like we're also pressured to have a big presence, we have to do everything.

Some of the participants' ability to define themselves as strong served as a form of resistance and at the same time, contributed to unhealthy perceptions of their workload and capacity. There were moments when some participants articulated that the expectations that were placed upon them were overwhelming, but they felt compelled to push through despite feeling overwhelmed. Jane recalled her perception of what it meant to be a Black woman, she said, "being strong or at least portraying oneself to be strong was a key element for persistence." Portraying oneself to be strong in this case meant that Black women were expected to take on more and therefore, not express any signs of vulnerability.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine Black women students' involvement experiences in predominantly White student organizations. This chapter highlighted the five primary themes that emerged from the data collected. These five themes, *Exclusion*, *Fake Inclusion*, *Gendered Racial Experiences*, *The "Double Minority" Experience*, and *Be Strong, Work Harder* provided insight into the individual and collective lived experiences of the Black women students that participated in this study. The chapter described each theme and provided narratives from participants that revealed how each theme described their experiences. The Black women in this study articulated the advantages and disadvantages of their lived experiences in

these predominantly White student organizations. The majority of the Black women in this study remained involved in their student organizations for an extended period of time, while others ended their involvement within week or months of becoming members. The lived experiences of the Black women in this study were congruent, yet, there was uniqueness in how they responded and coped within their environments. The Black women in this study were involved in PWSOs and the data revealed the nature of participants' interactions with peers and how they responded to those interactions. Furthermore, this chapter revealed the tactics that participants employed to navigate and survive within predominantly White student organizations.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study examined the lived experiences of Black collegiate women involved in predominantly White student organizations. This chapter discusses the five most prominent themes that emerged from the lived experiences of Black women students in this study and provides further analysis regarding the implications of those themes. The five themes are connected with the theoretical framework identified for this study in this chapter as well. This chapter also discusses the implications for research and practice regarding student affairs practitioners who work with student organizations, serve as student organization advisors, or have direct supervision of student organizations written into their job descriptions. Finally, this chapter addresses the limitations of the study and offers suggestions for future research related to Black women students' involvement in predominantly White student organizations.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study comprise of five major themes: *Exclusion, Fake Inclusion, Gendered Racial Experiences, The "Double Minority" Experience and Be Strong, Work Harder*. These five themes articulate the lived experiences of participants involvement in predominantly White student organizations. These themes also identify the nuances of the lived experiences of Black women in predominantly White student organizations at SSU. Articulated in the narratives of participants are the barriers and challenges that they encountered as well as the ways in which they were able to persist, develop agency, and create self-definitions for themselves and for Black women as a whole (Collins, 2000; Jeffries, Goldberg, Aston & Tomblin Murphy, 2018; Kelly, 2016). Consistent among the experiences of Black women in this study was a sense of ownership in developing self-definitions of Black womanhood and rejecting the previously held

misperceptions and gendered racial stereotypes of Black women (Collins, 2000; Jeffries et al., 2018). Individual agency of Black women was developed as a result of participants willingness to envision the potential for change and progress through their resistance of oppression within predominantly White student organizations (Collins, 2000).

Beyond Black women's exclusion within predominantly White student organizations at SSU, which are depicted in participants experiences, there was also evidence of institutional exclusion. Dani recalled her experience at the institution, "I think over time, I felt less and less like a part of SSU." Dani's sentiments of exclusion are reflective of Collins (2000) criticism of exclusionary practices within US social institutions. Collins (2000) argued that:

Black women's exclusion from positions of power within mainstream institutions has led to the elevation of elite White male ideas and interests and the corresponding suppression of Black women's ideas and interests in traditional scholarship... this historical exclusion means that stereotypical images of Black women permeate popular culture and public policy. (p. 5)

Since college and university campuses like SSU, are microcosms of large US social institutions (Jones, 1990; Sweet, 2009; Webb, 2012), it is accurate to assert that PWSOs are a microcosm, within a microcosm. The historical legacy of exclusion of Black women in higher education as a whole and specifically within PWIs, such as SSU, were manifested in the lived experiences of participants who were involved in predominantly White student organizations. Findings from this study suggest that Black women may not have full access to the benefits and outcomes of campus involvement. Participants experiences suggest that student organization involvement is experienced differently by Black women due to the gendered racism they encounter in predominantly White student organization environments.

Theme 1: Exclusion

The first theme, *Exclusion*, illustrates the isolated nature of participants' experiences as the only, or one of few, Black women involved in their student organizations. The Black women involved in these organizations participated in the recruitment and selection process that was required of them, yet several participants perceived there were barriers to their full participation within the organization. Participants shared stories of social isolation within their organization despite serving in key leadership roles. They expressed feelings of being undervalued as a result of attempts to engage within the organization and develop relationships with their White peers. This finding relates to what Everett and Croom (2017) identified as Black women "existing at the margins" (p. 76). That is, that Black women in higher education settings are often subject to a sort of invisibility that results in the devaluing of their holistic needs (Everett & Croom, 2017). Participants' individual encounters with exclusion were symptoms of the historical exclusion of Black women in PWSOs at SSU.

Theme 2: Fake Inclusion

The second theme, *Fake Inclusion*, illustrates the isolated nature of participants' experiences as the only, or one of few, Black women involved in their student organizations. The Black women who were involved in these organizations participated in the recruitment and selection process that was required of them, yet several participants perceived there were barriers to their full participation within the organization. Participants shared stories of social isolation within their organization despite serving in key leadership roles. They expressed feelings of being undervalued as a result of attempts to engage within the organization and develop relationships with their White peers. This finding relates to what Everett and Croom (2017) identified as Black women "existing at the margins" (p. 76). That is, that Black women in higher

education settings are often subject to a sort of invisibility that results in the devaluing of their holistic needs (Everett & Croom, 2017). The theme of *Fake Inclusion* also refers to participants' observations of the empty promises institutions make about pursuing more diverse and inclusive environments in their student organizations. Collins (2000) referred to this practice as "paying lip service" (p. 6) to the urgency of diversity. Collins (2000) also articulated it as a means to maintain oppression within systems and organizations. Organizations recruit Black women under the false pretense that they value diversity and inclusion, yet nothing changes regarding the daily institutional practices to make such diversity and inclusion a reality for those within the organization.

The study participants alleged that members and leaders within their organizations verbally conveyed a desire to pursue diversity within their membership and inclusivity among their practices and policies. However, when opportunities to implement such practices and policies were made available, those same members and leaders often backtracked on the aspirations they had espoused. When it came time to express such thoughts in public or in general body meetings, the Black students were the only advocates for diversity in the conversation. For instance, when it came time to elect Black students and other Students of Color in their organizations, White members tended to pursue tokenism (Robinson, 2013) rather than authentic representation.

The lack of representation of Black women in predominantly White organizations led to tokenism, which resulted in one or a few Black women being elevated as the lone voice of all Black students in the organization. Participants were made to feel as if they had to be the person to speak on behalf of their race or advocate for diversity within the organization. Scholars have concluded that tokenism exist in many predominantly White settings and often creates unsafe

environments for those who are underrepresented (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012). Researchers have found that experiences of tokenism for Black women exist in various settings within higher education: college student activist organizations, graduate school programs, athletic departments, and professional work settings (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Larsen, 2016; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) found that Black women often find refuge from the experiences of tokenization through participation in Black student organizations, especially historically Black sororities. *Fake Inclusion* resulted in study participants questioning their sense of identity and sense of belonging in their student organizations, a theme that mirrors the findings of Dortch and Patel's (2017) study on Black undergraduate women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) at predominantly White institutions. That study found that Black women lacked a sense of belonging and inclusion in their pursuit of degree programs in STEM (Dortch & Patel, 2017).

Theme 3: Gendered Racial Experiences

The theme *Gendered Racial Experiences* addressed the participants' frequent encounters with gendered racism (Essed, 1991) and gendered racial microaggressions (Lewis et al., 2013). The participants did not identify any instances of overt gendered racism; however, their experiences did include day-to-day subtle comments, interactions, and expectations about their gender and race. The Black women in this study shared the perception that their White peers expected them to perform like Black people portrayed in mass media (i.e., loud and angry). In addition, participants perceived expectations for them to speak as representatives for all Black people on matters of race in large settings, such as executive board or general body meetings. A consistent experience among participants was encountering perceptions of them as angry, unwelcoming, and unapproachable to White peers.

Several participants described feeling that they were viewed as intimidating, especially when they voiced their concerns in nonthreatening ways. Even when they occupied key leadership roles in the organization, some participants were subjected to *racialized experiences* and, in some cases, their leadership authority was undermined because of their race. These experiences shared by Black women in this study are similar to experiences that scholars have defined as *gendered racism* (Essed, 1991) or *gendered racial microaggressions* (Hotchkins, 2017; Lewis et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2016; Roland & Agosto, 2017; Szymanski & Lewis, 2014). Research has suggested that experiences with racial microaggressions can range from stereotypical assumptions about dialect, to comments about place of origin, to verbal assaults about natural hair-styles (Domingue, 2015; Patton, 2017). Lewis et al. (2013) characterized gendered racial microaggressions, as “subtle and everyday verbal, behavioral, and environmental expressions of oppression based on the intersection of one’s race and gender” (p. 766).

Participants emphasized that their involvement in PWSOs meant that confronting gendered racism (Essed, 1991) and gendered racial microaggressions (Lewis et al., 2013) was inevitable. The Black women in this study were cognizant of the stereotypical images that were projected upon them. The willingness of Black women to exist in such spaces was an act of resistance. Their existence, along with the ways that they produced “self-definitions” (Who are you citing here? Author, year, p. 10) of Black womanhood disrupted the power dynamics at play in PWSOs.

Theme 4: The “Double Minority” Experience

The Black women in this study described the complexity of their existence as Black women. Several identified themselves as being members of two oppressed identity groups and used the terminology “double minority” and perceived that the challenges they encountered were

due to navigating predominantly White student organizations. They were women but did not relate to or connect with the White women in the organizations; they were connected to Black men in organizational settings but could not fully be themselves around their Black male peers. At the intersection of their existence were expectations for them to be and exist as women and, at the same time, to be and exist as Black people.

Some participants described occasions when their existence as women might threaten their existence as Black people. Scholars refer to this ongoing tension of being a Black woman as a feeling of *two-ness*, denoting the responsibility that is placed upon Black women to exist and operate in two separate realms (Cooper, 2010; Delgado, 2011). In student organizations dominated by White women, participants found themselves using their voices to advocate for issues of race and ethnicity. Participants were able to develop positive and supportive relationships with Black male peers, yet one participant described an instance of tension with a Black male peer when it came to negotiating Blackness within one predominantly White student organization. These experiences speak to the complexity of being a Black woman involved in predominantly White student organizations. Participants identified their experiences in predominantly White organizations as being a *double minority*, which suggests that “oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (Collins, 2000, p. 18). As a result of Black women sharing their lived experiences as one of “intersecting oppressions” (p. 11), new knowledge is constructed (Collins, 2000). This new knowledge has the potential to inform institutional change in the practices and policies of organizations.

Theme 5: Be Strong, Work Harder

One constant among the participants' lived experiences was the sense that they had to be strong and work extremely hard just to exist in these predominantly White spaces. For some of the Black women, this necessitated internal motivation to prove they belonged, and proving their belonging relied on their ability to persist through the gendered racism (Croom, et al., 2017; Essed, 1991), gendered racial microaggressions (Hotchkins, 2017; Szymanski & Lewis, 2014), and tolerating the discomfort of their experiences without showing signs of weakness. Participants' described strength as a self-identifying attribute regarding their identity as Black women. One participant said that "the essence of Black women is strength." Previous research centering on Black collegiate women's identity development observed that existing as a Black woman and being strong were parallel (Porter, 2017).

Other participants described the external pressure that they felt from peers to be strong and achieve at high levels within their involvement experiences. These internal and external pressures were compounded with the equally taxing experiences of being stereotyped and labeled by peers in student organizations. All these pressures created expectations for them to seek key leadership roles and stand out among their peers, even if it was at the cost of other aspects of their lives. The concept of being strong and working hard has been documented by researchers as the "strong Black woman" (Donovan & West, 2014, p. 386) and the "superwoman" (Donahoo, 2017, p. 62) stereotypes. Scholars have asserted that such stereotypes are commonly embraced and worn as badges of honor among Black women students (Donovan & West, 2014). Watson and Hunter (2016) discussed the strong Black woman mentality and the potential benefits and liabilities of operating under this perspective. Among participants' lived experiences were moments where being strong was a source of strength and empowerment, moments when being

strong meant that participants had to suppress their emotions to persist in predominantly White organizations. Porter (2017) noted that “for some (Black women), strength enabled a sense of vulnerability with people the women could trust, while for others, strength implied a sense of independence and isolation while enduring their daily lives” (p. 93). The paradoxical nature of this theme is one that researchers have continued to discuss and debate (Donahoo, 2017; Donovan & West, 2014; Porter, 2017; Watson & Hunter, 2016). This theme is indicative of the role that Black Feminist Thought (BFT) plays in Black women’s resistance and activism in organizations that oppress them. Collins (2000) asserted that one method of resistance to the “discriminatory social practices” (p. 10) of White dominated structures was for Black women to construct their own understanding of Black womanhood. The essence of the lived experiences of Black women in this study meant that they redefined the narratives of their existence for themselves, for other Black women, and for the Black community as a whole (Collins, 2000). Participants willingness to navigate the oppressive nature of predominantly White student organization environments produced a sense of agency, that allowed them be change agents within their organizational settings. They were willing to navigate these environments because of their awareness of the opportunities that the skills, knowledge, and leadership experience would mean for their own uplift and for the uplift of Black women as a collective (Collins, 2000).

These five themes collectively describe the lived experiences of Black collegiate women who were involved in this study. Their stories provided insight into their thought processes and the challenges that they encountered. In addition, the lived experiences of Black women in this study elevate the subjugated existence and knowledge of Black women. Furthermore, their narratives of resilience and resistance to the oppression they encountered substantiates how

critical Black feminist epistemology is within the collective struggle for social justice and equity (Collins, 2000). Collins (2000) asserted:

Black feminist thought supports broad principles of social justice that transcend U.S. Black women's particular needs... as long as Black women's subordination within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation persists, Black feminism as an activist response to that oppression will remain needed. (p. 22)

Moreover, the experiences of the Black women in this study reveal what is wrong with campus involvement. It is also a "call to action" for student affairs professionals who are in positions to influence and shift the environments of predominantly White student organizations.

Findings and Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality theory encourages a collective approach to understanding the challenges of oppression within systems and structures in the U.S (Collins, 2000; 2015; Crenshaw, 1989). Through the examination of the racialized and gendered experiences of Black women, intersectionality offers a critique of the ways in which White patriarchal cultures have depicted the realities of Black women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Rooted in intersectionality, BFT or Black feminist epistemology result in the creation of new knowledge by expounding on the stories of Black women that address their intersecting, multi-dimensional lived experiences (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989). BFT was constructed as a means to study knowledge and how knowledge is created based upon social influences (Collins, 1990).

Collins (2000) suggested that the central purpose of U.S. BFT is to resist oppression, both in its practices and the ideas that justify it. The fact that the Black women in this study were involved in predominantly White student organizations, notwithstanding their experiences with racial and gender bias, is a form of resistance itself. Their commitment to serving, leading, and

being agents of change are evocative of what Collins (2000) referred to as “insider resistance” (p. 288). Insider resistance seeks to obtain positions of influence within social institutions or organizations to ensure that existing rules will be fairly administered and, if necessary, to change existing practices and policies (Collins, 2000). Spring reflected about how important she felt it was for her to be involved in predominantly White student organizations, “realizing that being a part of these organizations is setting a precedence so that diversity and inclusion becomes paramount for our university.” Furthermore, by sharing their lived experiences of involvement in predominantly White student organizations, the Black women in this study developed agency by resisting the oppressive practices, ideas, and narratives that exist in predominantly white student organizations.

BFT was the primary theoretical framework used to conceptualize the lived experiences of Black women in this study because the main goal of a phenomenological study is to investigate the shared lived experiences of a specific phenomenon. In addition to the new knowledge that was created by focusing on the dual identities of race and gender, BFT also provided a critique of the power structures and systems (predominantly White student organizations). The experiences of Black women in this study were congruent with several key elements of BFT and the nature of interaction between Black women and systems of power. In this case, the systems of power were predominantly White student organizations.

Black women in this study shared how they were confronted by certain assumptions about Black womanhood (Collins, 2000). These assumptions served as a rationale for Black women to be stereotyped by their White peers as angry, aggressive, and unapproachable. Such actions resulted in the disqualification of Black women’s voices, insights, and value in these spaces. Collins (2000) argued that the historic omission of Black women in key leadership roles

in White institutions or organizations has allowed for the ongoing depiction of stereotypical images and resulted in the further exclusion of Black women in those organizations. The ongoing exclusion of Black women in PWSOs at SSU meant that stereotypical images were allowed to exist without being contested by Black women. Collins (2000) also highlighted a specific tactic that allowed for oppression to remain in institutional structures by “paying lip service to the need for diversity but changing little about one’s own practice” (p. 6). Similar to the theme of *Fake Inclusion*, this tactic fostered an artificial climate where emblematic inclusion was accepted rather than genuine, substantive changes (Collins, 2000).

Black women in this study categorized their involvement in PWSOs as a *double minority*. Participants’ perception of themselves as a *double minority* substantiated why the use of BFT is essential to understanding the unique positionality of Black women. Collins (2000) asserted:

Because U.S. Black women have access to the experiences that accrue to being both Black and female, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a Black women’s standpoint should reflect the convergence of both sets of experiences. Race and gender may be analytically distinct, but in Black women’s everyday lives, they work together. (p. 269)

Black Feminist Thought Domains of Power

Collins (2000) theorized Black women’s lived experiences as being influenced by the social constructions of power in society. BFT related the implications of such experiences with the social realities of Black women in the function of four domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. The structural domain outlines the organization of power within systems. The systems of power were predominantly White student organizations. The essence of the lived experiences of Black women in this study was reflected by the

underrepresentation of Black women in predominantly White student organizations. In some cases, participants were the only Black members in those organizations. Participants were not represented in key leadership roles within the organization. There was also a lack of representation of Black women at the advisor or staff level. The exclusion of Black women students in leadership roles in PWSOs mirrors the practices of U.S. social institutions in which Black women are not given full access to participate and contribute (Collins, 2000; Johnson, 2017).

The disciplinary domain is concerned with how organizational structures are managed to “hide the effects of racism and sexism under the canopy of efficiency, rationality, and equal treatment” (Collins, 2002, p. 8). The Black women in this study discussed the barriers they encountered when seeking to elect more diverse representation on committees and executive leadership teams. Several participants revealed the obstacles they encountered when attempting to advocate for representation during an election process. Due to those already in positions of power and the processes that had been implemented to identify students for leadership positions, Black women in this study articulated that the system did not work in favor of more diverse representation. Black women students who did obtain positions of influence and leadership advocated for changes to those practices and processes that stifled opportunities to diversify membership and leadership. They also encouraged dialogue to address how the organizations could be more inclusive spaces for Black women.

The hegemonic domain focuses on the means by which people are socialized into organizations and structures. The process itself adheres to socially acceptable norms, behaviors, and thought processes. The hegemonic domain acts as a point of connection between social institutions (structural domain), their organizational practices (disciplinary domain), and the level

of everyday social interaction (interpersonal domain) (Collins, 2000). Black women in this study encountered environments where they could not fully be themselves due to the expectations and norms that had been created within predominantly White student organizations. The participants felt that they had to change their diction or perform in a manner that would be accepted by their White peers in the organizations. Some participants navigated student organizations by code switching (Koch, Gross & Gross, 2001; Payne & Suddler, 2014); others decided to end their involvement because the pressure to meet unrealistic expectations and norms caused emotional stress; some unwaveringly resisted norms and expectations and accepted the consequences that came along with their resistance. Collins (2000) summarized the nature of Black women's resistance:

Coming to recognize that one need not believe everything one is told and taught is freeing for many Black women... the hegemonic domain becomes a critical site for not just fending off hegemonic ideas from dominant culture, but in crafting counter-hegemonic knowledge that fosters changed consciousness. (p. 285)

The interpersonal domain describes individual experiences and perception of one's self-identity. According to Collins (2000), "the interpersonal domain functions through routinized, day-to-day practices of how people treat one another (e.g., microlevel of social organization). Such practices are systematic, recurrent, and so familiar that they often go unnoticed" (p. 287).

As a result of the ongoing and routine practices of racial bias, microaggressions, and stereotypes, several Black women in this study experienced feelings of being undervalued in predominantly White student organizations. These participants defined their success in student organizations by their ability to overcome the ongoing assaults against their identity. The complexity of Black women's duality in environments that are socially constructed to oppress

them was that they could achieve success and be trailblazers and yet have to wrestle with questions about their abilities and value in predominantly White student organizations. The individual and collective accounts of the Black women in this study existed within each domain of power and revealed their interconnectedness and contradictions (Collins, 2002).

Significance of Findings

Student organizations provide opportunities for college students to connect to their campuses outside of the classroom; furthermore, campus involvement is a means for college students, regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender to develop connections to their college campus (Astin, 1999; Kaufman & Feldman, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Shook & Keup, 2012). Despite the positive benefits attributed to campus involvement, scholars have maintained that Black students who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) experience racial bias and social isolation both inside and outside of the classroom (Davis et al., 2004; Porter & Parks, 2011; Ross, 2015; Strayhorn, 2013). Previous research on Black women students has focused on their experiences as undergraduate students at PWIs (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, & Pollio, 2004; Domingue, 2015; Dortch & Patel, 2017; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Hotchkins, 2017; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Miles, Jones, Clemons, & Golay, 2011; Mensah, 2010; Stewart, 2002; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). While these studies have provided context and insights regarding the experiences of Black women students, they did not speak specifically to the nuanced experience of organizational cultures within college campuses such as predominantly White student organizations.

The lived experiences of Black women in this study provided insight for campus involvement offices and student organization advisors who work directly with registered student organizations on college and university campuses. The experiences of the participants, told in

their own words, shed light on how Black women students navigated predominantly White student organization environments amid gender and racial bias. This study explored the gendered and racialized interactions that Black women encountered as members of predominantly White student organizations. Furthermore, it provides specific context to the structural elements of racism and sexism that exist within student organization settings that are predominantly White.

Implications for Student Affairs Practice

The findings of this study offer several implications for student affairs practitioners who work with student organizations, serve as student organization advisors, or have direct supervision of student organizations written into their job descriptions. While previous research has provided evidence of the positive outcomes for all students who are involved on their college campuses, and specifically those who are members of student organizations (Astin, 1999; Kaufman & Feldman, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Shook & Keup, 2012; Webber, Krylow, & Zhang, 2013; Tinto, 2010), findings from this study show that more effort is warranted to ensure predominantly White student organization environments are spaces where such outcomes can be experienced by all students, especially Black women. Black women students encounter oppressive attitudes and structures within predominantly White institutions (Collins, 2000; Johnson, 2017). This study draws the conclusion that Black collegiate women also encounter similar oppressive attitudes and structures, specifically within predominantly White student organizations. To ensure that PWSOs are settings that are welcoming and inclusive, a deeper emphasis on diversity and inclusion is warranted in graduate preparation programs (Cooper, Howard-Hamilton, Cuyjet, & Linder, 2016; Pope, Mueller, & Reynolds, 2014). Student affairs professionals have the responsibility of promoting and nurturing campus environments that are welcoming and inclusive of all students (Cooper et al., 2016; Jones et al.,

2014; Pope & Mueller, 2016). The findings of this study challenge student affairs professionals to move beyond surface-level conversations and “lip service” (Collins, 2000, p. 6) methods of addressing issues of diversity and inclusion in campus involvement settings.

Dialogue and Training for Student Affairs Practitioners

Participants in this study discussed the importance of having more in-depth conversations about diversity and inclusion within student organization settings. Such conversations would need to be facilitated by a student affairs professional who are properly trained (Pope et al., 2014). Student affairs divisions should also incorporate more diversity and inclusion, gender bias and ant-racist training during onboarding activities (Cooper et al., 2016). The implementation of such activities could ensure that students affairs professionals are equipped to facilitate such conversations among students and within student organization settings. Training can provide opportunities to raise the awareness of student affairs professionals regarding the experiences of Black women in PWSOs (Cooper et al., 2016). This is important so that new professionals are equipped to shape student organization environments that are inclusive of all students (Pope et al., 2014; Pope & Mueller, 2016), particularly when they are hired in positions in which they have advisory or supervisory responsibilities of student organizations.

Dialogue and Training for Student Organization Members and Leaders

Several participants in this study made the decision to end their involvement in predominantly White student organizations. Experiences of tokenism and underrepresentation of Black women in predominantly White students organizations has the potential to lessen the desire of Black women to pursue membership in predominantly White students organizations. Campus involvement offices should provide required training and dialogue programs to new and existing student organizations members regarding the importance of inclusivity in student

organization settings (Cooper et al., 2016; Jones, Schuh & Torres, 2014). Participants discussed the importance of creating opportunities within their organizations to have more intentional conversations about diversity and inclusion that go beyond surface level conversations. Students seeking leadership roles in student organizations should be required to participate in anti-racist and gender bias training prior to or upon obtaining leadership roles in student organizations. Doing so would empower student leaders with the tools to promote and shape more inclusive environments (Jones et al., 2014; Pope et al., 2014). Some participants discussed how their leadership experiences in ethnic-specific student organizations were devalued by student leaders in predominantly White student organizations. To confront the bias that exists related to student leadership experiences in ethnic-specific student organization, campus involvement offices and student leadership development offices should collaborate to implement leadership training that focuses on the value of all leadership development experiences on college campuses.

Student Organization Advisors

One of three critical roles or functions that Dunkel and Chrystal-Green (2016) identified for student organization advisors is the role of educator. As educator, student organization advisors are uniquely positioned to be agents of change and progress within predominantly White student organizations. With adequate training and development in diversity and multicultural education, student organization advisors can disrupt the gendered racism that exist in predominantly White student organizations. If student organization advisors are properly trained when it comes to awareness of gendered racial microaggressions and gendered racial stereotypes, they can be more proactive in promoting inclusivity and diversity within organization settings; and train students in predominantly White students organization to be more inclusive members, leaders and peers to Black women. Another function that Dunkel and

Chrystal-Green (2016) ascribed to student organizations advisors is that of a preservationist, referring to the expectation that students have of advisors to, “maintain a sense of the organization’s history” (p. 474). Because of the historical exclusion of Black women in predominantly White student organizations, advisors must be careful to not preserve such historical aspects of organizational structures, policies, and practices that oppress or subjugate Black women. Student organization advisors have the ability to preserve the history of student organizations in ways that are healthy and effective. However, student organizations also have the opportunity shape new ways of existence for student organizations whereby Black women are empowered members and leaders in predominantly White student organizations; where they are able to fully participate in their student organization involvement. Dunkel and Chrystal-Green (2016) contended that student organization advisors, “serve as the moral conscience and keeper of institutional memory” (p. 471). As the moral conscience, student organization advisors are well positioned to positively influence how Black women experience predominantly White student organization environments.

Representation of Black Women in Student Affairs Positions

Several participants in this study noted the positive benefit of having an experienced student leader or a student organization advisor who identified as a Black woman. For instance, Sasha noted, “I think it's so important to have Black female mentors in leadership and to have those conversations and to have Black women in positions like vice-president of the SGO, or things like that.” Participants discussed how representation at the advisor level in PWSOs made a difference for them as Black women when it came to feeling supported. Speaking of her supervisor who was a Black woman, Tiffany recalled, “She helped with a lot of different things and helped guide me. That was a really good experience. Having her as somebody to talk to and

lean on, and talk to about things that I was facing.” Campus involvement and student programming offices might consider the effect of representation when hiring staff in their offices who work directly with student organizations.

Collins (2000) noted that stereotypical images of Black women are allowed to persist in organizational structures due to the lack of representation or underrepresentation of Black women. The presence of more Black women administrators on multiple levels within student affairs divisions can aid in the deconstruction of stereotypical images and ideas that are often held about Black women. The visibility of Black women in key leadership roles could send a message to students, faculty, and staff about the value system of student affairs divisions related to representation (Jones et al., 2014). As noted by participant stories, the presence of more Black women in advisor and supervision roles resulted in Black women students feeling more supported and connected to student organizations. Some of the participants in this study noted that they ended their involvement in student organizations because of their encounters with racial and gender bias, microaggressions, and stereotypes. The ability of student affairs professionals to create environments that are not oppressive for Black women could result in the participation and retention of Black women in predominantly White student organizations. Some participants in this study left their student organizations and told stories of other Black women also leaving organizations because the environments were not welcoming to them. A focus on retaining Black women in these organizations could potentially increase the representation of Black women within student organizations.

Implementation of Antiracist Practices and Training

Participants discussed how they constantly encountered racial microaggressions, stereotypes, and problematic perceptions of Black womanhood. Adopting an anti-racist and

gender bias training curriculum in student organization training modules for members and leaders could minimize occurrences of racism and sexism. Anti-racist training is centered on the idea that individuals can unlearn racism and seeks to develop individuals who can recognize and reflect upon their social location and the complexity of the intersections of oppressions (St. Clair & Kishimoto, 2010). St. Clair and Kishimoto (2010) asserted that:

These efforts are challenging but are necessary to analyze how internalized inferiority and superiority work in our lives and in the systems we operate in. We envision that one can enter the path of becoming an antiracist at any point, one can travel slowly or at a steadier pace, our paths may have detours and setbacks but that being on the path is the most important thing. (p. 18)

Similar training could also provide opportunities for the kind of ongoing dialogue and constructive conversation among students that can lead to a greater representation of Black women in these organizations. These efforts could also result in more inclusive spaces where Black women students are empowered and able to thrive as members and leaders in predominantly White student organizations.

Inclusive Student Organization Environments

More inclusive student organization environments also have the potential to impact Black women's sense of belonging at predominantly White institutions, as experiences with gendered racism can lead Black women to question their sense of belonging (Mensah, 2010). Inclusive and welcoming student organization spaces for Black women can result in positive interactions with White peers thereby contributing to positive interpersonal relationships which also affect sense of belonging (Shook & Keup, 2012). Sense of belonging for Black women can also influence their *affinity* to their college or university. Institution affinity refers to, "one's level of

commitment and pride for the institution” (Berquam, 2013, p. 9). Berquam (2013) argued that student impressions of their campus involvement was one of four constructs that contributed to a students’ development of institutional affinity.

Limitations of Study

This study provides student affairs administrators with direct insight into the lived experiences of Black undergraduate women involved in predominantly White student organizations. There is much that can be garnered from participants’ lived experiences; however, this study does have limitations. Scholars argue that Black women students’ experiences are diverse in nature (Croom et al., 2017; Patton et al., 2017). This study paid particular attention to the experiences of Black women and the intersection of their identities as Black and as women. While some participants discussed other aspects of their identities, such as sexual orientation and religion, this study did not specifically focus on the broader scope of intersecting identities. Another limitation of this study is the number of participants that were interviewed for this study; therefore, I cannot generalize the findings of this study as applied to all Black women who are involved in predominantly White student organizations. The goal of qualitative research is to obtain descriptive data through the lived experiences of research participants (Hesse-Biber, 2016). In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for the collection of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher in this case is a Black man investigating the experiences of Black women. While measures were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, it is important to acknowledge that my positionality and male privilege is also a limitation in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black undergraduate women involved in PWSOs at one higher education institution in the Southeast. The findings of the study presented opportunities to inform the practices of student affairs professionals who work with and advise predominantly White student organizations. Future studies could explore the associated emotional and mental health implications for Black women who consistently encounter gendered racism in the context of their experiences in predominantly White student organizations. This study encompassed the experiences of ten Black women at one institution in the Southeast. Future research could explore the experiences of Black women in PWSOs at multiple institutions in other regions of the country. Additional research may also be warranted to investigate the experiences of Black women in PWSOs with a focus on other intersecting identities such as socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual orientation. Further research might also focus on identifying practices for implementing and maintaining student organization environments that are inclusive of Black women and other Women of Color. Finally, this study presented five major themes that emerged from participant data. There were additional themes that were not as substantial as the themes discussed in this study, such as: the role of Black women as diversity champions in predominantly White student organizations; negotiating Blackness between Black men and Black women in predominantly White student organizations; the role of Black faculty and staff in supporting Black women who are involved in predominantly White student organizations; superficial relationships with White peers in PWSOs; and the cultural insensitivity of White peers in predominantly White student organizations. These underdeveloped themes provide opportunities for future exploration and research.

Summary

The scope of this study was to examine the essence of the lived experiences of Black women students in predominantly White student organizations. The findings of this study revealed the lived experiences of Black women who were involved in these organizations and their encounters with racial and gender bias. Furthermore, this study described the five major themes that emerged from the data: *Exclusion*, *Fake Inclusion*, *Gendered Racialized Experiences*, *The “Double Minority” Experience*, and *Be Strong, Work Harder*. This study analyzed of the five themes through the lens of Black Feminist Thought.

This study also described the association between the core themes of *Exclusion*, *Fake Inclusion*, *Racialized Experiences*, *The “Double Minority” Experience*, and *Be Strong, Work Harder*, and the four domains of Black Feminist Thought. The mechanisms that were employed to protect the confidentiality of research participants and the integrity of the data collected; the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher were also addressed in this study. This phenomenological study also included the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. Lastly, this study outlined the impact of the study’s findings on the current body of research related to Black college women and how the findings from this study informed the practices of student affairs professionals who work with predominantly White student organizations.

Conclusion

Campus involvement activities can be environments where college students experience growth and development. They can also be settings where college students create life-long relationships with peers. The findings of this study include instances where Black women experience growth and development; and instances where they were able to develop meaningful

friendships with peers. However, the findings of this study also exposed the pervasiveness of racism and gender bias that exists within predominantly White student organizations. Through the lens of Black Feminist Thought, the findings of this study articulate the oppressive nature of PWSOs on Black women's lived experiences. The narratives of the study participants can aid student affairs professionals in dismantling the oppressive nature of student organizational structures for Black women and for other Students of Color who desire to participate in student organizations.

Student affairs professionals have the responsibility of promoting and nurturing campus environments that are welcoming and inclusive of all students (Cooper et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2014; Pope & Mueller, 2016). The findings of this study challenge student affairs professionals to move beyond surface level conversations and "lip service" (Collins, 2000, p. 6) methods of addressing issues of diversity and inclusion in campus involvement settings. Findings from this study could inform how diversity and inclusion training and professional development opportunities are structured in graduate preparation programs and in onboarding activities for student affairs professionals.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your experience as a Black woman in a predominantly White student organization.
2. How has your race and gender shaped your involvement in this organization?
 - How has your gender influenced your development?
 - How has your race influenced your development?
3. What does it mean to be a Black woman involved in this organization?
 - What does it mean to be a Black student involved in this organization?
 - What does it mean to be a Woman involved in this organization?
4. Describe your relationship with your peers who are also involved in this student organization.
 - Describe your relationship with your Black peers who are also involved in this student organization.
 - Describe your relationship with your White peers who are also involved in this student organization.
5. Tell me about your relationship with your student organization advisor.
 - Do you feel supported?
 - If so, how? If not, why not?
6. How do you cope with being a Black woman involved in this student organization?
 - Who or where do you look to for emotional support?
 - Who or where do you look to for social support?
7. What motivates you to remain involved in this student organization?
8. Would you recommend other Black women to participate in this student organization?
 - If so, why? If not, why not?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your participation in this organization?

Appendix B

Pre-Screening Questions

Background

10. Where are you from?
11. What kind of high school (public or private) did you attend?
12. How involved were you in high school?

General Questions

13. What is your major?
14. Do you live on campus?
15. What is your academic classification?

Campus Involvement

16. Are you currently involved in any student organizations on campus?
 - How long have you been involved on campus?
17. What is the racial make-up of the student organizations that you are involved in?
 - What is your role within the student organization?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Statement

Navigating White Spaces: A Phenomenological Study of Black Women's Involvement
Experience in Predominantly White Student Organizations

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in a research study because you identify as a Black woman and because of your participation in a predominantly White student organization, at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to explore Black women college students' involvement experiences in predominantly White student organizations. Further, the goal of this research is to investigate how Black women college students make meaning of their membership and participation in campus involvement structures that are majority White, in regard to their racial and gender identity.

To participate in this study, you must meet the following criteria for this study: 1) Self-identify as a Black woman; 2) Attend a predominantly White college or university; 3) Be active within a predominantly White or historically White student organization (i.e., campus programming boards, student government associations, student alumni organization, college/university recruitment team, presidential/provost ambassadors program, campus pride or traditions organization, student allocations/student program fee committee; and 4) be a recognized member of the organization.

As a participant, you will participate in an individual interview that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. You will be asked a series of questions by myself (the researcher) and your responses will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy of the information that you share during your interview. Throughout the interview, I will take written notes to help with memory recall during the data analysis process. Upon the completion of your interview, you will be asked to identify a pseudonym that will be used to reference your responses throughout my study. A pseudonym is an artificial name that will be used to reference your responses for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality.

After the interview has been completed and analysis has been done, I plan to schedule a 30-minute follow-up interview with you to share data analysis for verification of accuracy and to provide any additional feedback about the analysis.

RISKS

While I will make every reasonable effort to ensure the confidentiality of your participation, there is no guarantee of absolute privacy. Due to your interview being digitally recorded, there is a reasonable concern for protecting your identity as a participant in this study. In an effort to maintain confidentiality, you will self-select a pseudonym prior to the data analysis process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Upon selection, the pseudonym will be referenced in data analysis

instead of your name. Digital record files will be stored on internal hard drive and will be password protected. Your transcript will be password protected on an internal hard drive. Your transcription will also be labeled using your pseudonym. Access to digital record files and transcripts will be restricted to myself. As a safeguard, I will transcribe your interview independently. After three years, the digital record and transcript files will be permanently deleted from the hard drive.

BENEFITS

You may not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, this study seeks to close the gap in the literature regarding how Black women college students make meaning of their experiences within predominantly White student organizations. The research will provide more insight to university administrators about the experiences of Black women and how administrators can create more inclusive student organization environments for Black women students.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in my study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Dametraus Jagers, at djagers@utk.edu or (865)964-3798, and his advisor, Dr. Dorian McCoy, at dmccoy5@utk.edu or (865)974-6140. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at utkirb@utk.edu or (865) 974-7697.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be deleted.

Your research information may be used for future research studies or shared with other researchers for use in future research studies without obtaining additional informed consent from you. If this happens, all of your identifiable information will be removed before any future use or distribution to other researchers.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Invitation to Participate in Research Study

My name is Dametraus Jagers and I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville working on a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration. I am conducting a research study tentatively titled, Navigating White Spaces: A Phenomenological Study of Black Women's Involvement Experience in Predominantly White Student Organizations.

I am writing to request an interview with you and would be honored if you would agree to participate. You are being invited to participate in a research study because you identify as a Black woman and because of your participation in a predominantly White student organization, at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The purpose of this research study is to explore Black women college students' involvement experiences in predominantly White student organizations.

To participate in this study, you must meet the following criteria for this study: 1) Self-identify as a Black woman; 2) Attend a predominantly White college or university; 3) Be active within a predominantly White or historically White student organization (i.e., campus programming boards, student government associations, student alumni organization, college/university recruitment team, presidential/provost ambassadors program, campus pride or traditions organization, student allocations/student program fee committee; and 4) be a recognized member of the organization.

If you fit the criteria of this study and you would like to participate, please contact me by at djagers@utk.edu or (865)964-3798.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. As a participant, you will participate in an individual interview that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. You will be asked a series of questions and your responses will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy of the information that you share during your interview. As a result of your participation, the research findings of this study will provide more insight to university administrators about the experiences of Black women.

The information in my study records will be kept confidential.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Dametraus Jagers, at djagers@utk.edu or (865)964-3798, and his advisor, Dr. Dorian McCoy, at dmccoy5@utk.edu or (865)974-6140

Thank you in advance for your consideration,
Damettraus L. Jagers

VITA

Dametraus Lewis Jagers was born in Cleveland, OH, to the parents of Jessie Jagers and Richard Williams. Dametraus grew up as a middle child with an older sister, Alvenia Jagers; and a younger brother, Ricky Jagers. He attended Superior Elementary from Kindergarten to fourth grade in East Cleveland, OH. He also attended Forest Park Middle and Central Middle School in Euclid, OH. Dametraus graduated from Euclid High School in May 2004 and enrolled in Cuyahoga Community College during Fall 2004. Dametraus transferred to Kent State University in January 2005 to pursue a bachelors of business of administration in marketing. While at Kent State University, Dametraus was a walk-on football player and was initiated into Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated. Dametraus was selected to participate in the Columbus Program for Intergovernmental Issues at Kent State University. The Columbus Program was a transformative experience and altered the trajectory of Dametraus' career path. Dametraus graduate from Kent State University with his Bachelors of Business Administration degree in December 2008. He accepted a graduate assistant position with the Department of Residence Services at Kent State and began graduate school in January 2009. Dametraus graduated with his Masters of Education degree in Higher Education Administration and Student Personnel in December 2010. Dametraus has worked as the Coordinator of Multicultural Affairs and Student Success at The Ohio State University-Mansfield. He also worked as the Associate Director for Multicultural Student Life at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville from July 2012 to March 2016. Dametraus graduated from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville with his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Higher Education Administration in May 2019. Currently, Dametraus is the Founding Director of a high school youth theology initiative and Assistant Professor at

Johnson University in Knoxville, TN. Dametraus will celebrate ten years of marriage to Kristen Jagers in September 2019. He is the father of two boys, Davin (8) and Dallas Jagers (6).