SPEAKING FROM WITHIN:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN
IN THE CONNECTICUT HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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This work is dedicated to fellow Black Sistah Queens.

You matter.

I see you.

I hear you.

I am you.
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Abstract

This phenomenological study aimed to describe and understand how Black women faculty and staff working at a public college or university in Connecticut experienced and perceived organizational culture. Studies report that African-American students and faculty are misplaced, misrecognized, not recognized (Robinson, 2015; Andrews, 2012; Ford, 2011) and experience chilly organizational climates. The research attempted to answer one question: What are Black female professionals’ perceptions of their experience with organizational culture in the CSCU system? The participants included seven Black female professionals with three or more years working in the CSCU system. The theoretical underpinnings guiding the study were Edgar Schein’s organizational culture model and Patricia Hill Collins’ Black Feminist thought. The results of this study revealed that Black female professionals perceived the culture within the CSCU system to be exclusive and difficult to navigate. The participants identified three themes: (a) lack of diversity, (b) the importance of leadership, and (c) the importance of relationships. The study concludes with recommendations and suggestions for further research.

*Keywords:* organizational culture; Black women; higher education; marginalization; hegemony.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Diversity in higher education is a highly-researched phenomenon. Nevertheless, we lack studies regarding how perceptions of organizational culture influence the lived experiences of diverse populations. The current body of organizational culture research maintains that diversity within an organization represents both an asset and a liability to organizational culture (Herring, 2009; Golder & Macy, 2011). Some scholars posit that a diverse employee base begets innovation (Forbes Insight, n.d.), student satisfaction (Herring, 2009), and positive employee buy-in and retention, while other scholars argue that diversity in the workplace creates an atmosphere of conflict and biased hiring practices (Scalia, 2015). Additional research is needed on how racial and gender diversity contributes to the lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture. Examining how Black female teaching and non-teaching faculty perceive an organization’s culture may provide valuable insight into how perceptions of organizational culture affect the lived experiences of Black women as well as an opportunity to begin to understand how perceptions of organizational culture affect racially and gender-diverse populations in academia.

The subsequent sections of this chapter provide background on the problem of practice, an overview of the research question and theoretical framework, and a brief discussion of existing research on minority faculty and staff perceptions of organizational culture and the influence those perceptions have on lived experiences. The chapter is broken into five parts. The first section, problem of practice, examines diversity in academia and corporate arenas. The second, significance, discusses the contribution of the research. The third, positionality, divulges the researcher’s personal biases. The fourth, research questions and goals, presents the aims of the research. The fifth and final section, theoretical frameworks, outlines an organizational
culture model and Black feminist thought and grounds the proposed research in scholarly insights.

**Problem of Practice**

Institutions struggle with identifying how to service, attract, retain, and educate minority students, faculty, and staff (Wagner, 2008). As a result, faculty and staff diversity at institutions of higher education presents as much of a challenge today as it did prior to affirmative action (Allen, Teranishi, Dinwiddie, & Gonzalez, 2000; Strauss, 2016). Statistics from 1975 reveal that 4.4% of full-time faculty were African-American, 1.4% were Hispanic, and 2.2% were Asian (Blackwell, 1989). Thirty years later, a report issued by The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) found that 79% of full-time instructional faculty members were of European descent, compared to 6% African-American, 4% Hispanic, and 9% Asian or Pacific Islander. While the number of African-Americans, Hispanics, and other minority groups teaching in higher education increased in comparison to faculty of European descent, the imbalance reveals that “Black faculty are not evenly distributed across America’s universities” (Strauss, 2016, p. 2). Minorities who obtain positions within higher education do so with the understanding that different organizational norms, manifested in unspoken rules, amended policies, and revised promotion and tenure standards, exist for them, and that they must adhere to these in order to maintain their positions (Green & King, 2001; Kohli, 2012). Subsequent research on racial and gender diversity revealed:

- People of color lag behind in the corporate and academic workforce (Wallace, 2015).
- Women are underrepresented in leadership positions in academia and corporate arenas in America and abroad (Catalyst, 2015; Powell & Butterfield, 2002; Rooney, 2015).
• Although women surpass men in holding teaching positions, there are fewer Blacks and Hispanics regardless of gender teaching in grades K-12 (Bireda & Chait, 2011).

• The social order of the organization is determined by the majority group (Bushman, 2013; Festinger, 1954; Williams & Taormina, 2001) and may inflict intentional or unintentional exclusion practices on minorities (Schein, 2010).

Based on the racial and gender diversity literature, it may be asserted that education (Allen, et al., 2001; Kimbrough, 2015) and employment inequity (Lyons & Chesley, 2004), promotion and hiring bias (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammart, 2000), ambiguous employment conditions (Pyke, 2013, p. 444), and an exclusive organizational culture (Dumas-Hines, Cochran, & Williams, 2001; Turner, 2002) may contribute to the limited presence of minority faculty and staff in higher education. Andrews (2012) argued that despite attempts to support the success and advancement of minorities, African Americans in particular, the gap in leadership and professorate positions is widening. Examining how perceptions of organizational culture affect the lived experiences of racially and gender diverse populations may inform the discussion on diversity and minority teaching and nonteaching representation on college campuses.

**Significance**

Over the past 20 years, an influx of minority students has enrolled in and attended predominantly White institutions (Andrews, 2012), that is, institutions where enrollments of White students have traditionally exceeded 50 percent. The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported that between 2009 and 2010, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and other groups of non-European descent constituted 60.9% of the student population pursuing associate or bachelor degrees, compared to 19% of the minority faculty working at degree-granting
institutions. Research conducted by Blackwell (1989) and Tough (2014) found a positive correlation between minority faculty and staff presence and minority student degree completion. They claimed minority students were more likely to graduate from college when they had opportunities to interact with minority faculty and staff (Blackwell, 1989; Dumas-Hines et al., 2001; Ingersoll & May, 2011; King, 1993; Tough, 2014). Though more Black and Hispanic students are entering institutions of higher education, Black students are less likely to graduate and obtain a college degree than other racial minorities or Caucasian students (Perna, 2016; Krogstad & Fry, 2014; Carey, 2008). Opp (2000) attributed the minority student graduation rates to exclusive organizational cultures, claiming that student affairs officers of color were more likely to promote and enact an atmosphere or culture of belonging for students of color than White student affairs officers. Herein lies the significance of this research: The corollary, based on the representation of minority teaching and non-teaching faculty on college campuses, is that minority students may be less likely to (a) attend college, (b) remain in college, (c) obtain a college degree, and (d) earn the credentials needed to secure positions in higher education than their non-minority counterparts (Tough, 2014);

This correlation is significant locally and nationally. To hold colleges and universities accountable for the poor graduation rates of minority students, the federal government enacted legislation in 2008 (Longanecker, 2008) that reauthorized institutional funding based on performance (Performance-Based Budgeting for Higher Education, 2015). This reauthorization of funding is known as performance-based budgeting. This budgeting requires colleges and universities to strategically plan and utilize quantifiable data (Melkers & Willoughby, 1998, p. 1) or formulas to assess and provide a rubric for funding based on “performance indicators such as course completion, time to degree, transfer rates, the number of degrees awarded, or the number
of low-income and minority graduates” (Performance-Based Budgeting for Higher Education, 2015). On a local level, public colleges and universities are being forced to strategically plan and assess areas that may negatively affect institutional performance; minority faculty and staff presence on campuses may be one of those areas (Gregerman, Lerner, Hippel, Jonides, & Nagda, 1998; Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008; Moore & Tolliver, 2010).

This research examined the perceptions of Black women in Connecticut, one of five states with performance-based budgeting legislation approved by its State Senate, which at this writing was awaiting implementation (Performance-Based Budgeting for Higher Education, 2015). The racial demography of students enrolled in the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system resembles the national trend. In 2011, 64.2% of the students enrolled at a state college or university in Connecticut were Black, Hispanic, or of other non-European descent, and 35.8% were Caucasian. Of the 64% of racial minorities enrolled, 26.3% graduated, compared to 73.3% of Caucasian graduates (Facts & Figures, 2012, 2015). While statistics on student enrollment and demographics are readily available through the CSCU system website, faculty and staff demographic information is not. Though this research project did not intend to examine minority students’ experiences or graduation rates, by examining the perspectives of minority faculty and staff, the researcher believed data may be retrieved that could directly inform how institutions approached organizational culture and diversity as it influences minority teaching and non-teaching faculty, and how it indirectly impacts minority student graduation rates.

**Positionality**

This research emerged from the observation of a shortage of minorities at the community college at which I was employed. As one of nine African American women holding a non-
clerical, non-entry level position at this college, I was reminded of the imbalance between minority and majority groups each time I attended a college administrative meeting or an external meeting with stakeholders. Thus, examining the lived experiences of Black women working in the State of Connecticut’s higher education system resonated with my experience.

As an African American woman, I understand and recognize the relationship and correlation between diversity and educational outcomes (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, Gurin, 2002). As such, I maintain an obligation to ensure that minority students, in particular African American students, are acquainted with me and can utilize me as a resource. Kohli (2012) affirmed the importance of maintaining a culturally diverse faculty and staff, stating that “the more students encounter teachers [and administrators] from similar racial and cultural backgrounds, the more culturally relevant and meaningful their education will be” (p. 182). Even though studies show the importance of retaining faculty and staff who resemble students served, the disparity between African Americans and others persists on my campus.

A potential challenge I faced because of this positionality was that I am not only an African American woman, but also an administrator on a college campus in the state where I conducted the research. Thus the data could be influenced by my experiences and approaches to data interpretation. While I aimed to investigate Black female professionals’ perceptions of their experience with organizational culture, I acknowledge that my positionality may marginalize others and inadvertently perpetuate the same exclusive community of practice I am attempting to research. As such, I committed to minimizing and clarifying personal bias by journaling, employing member checking throughout the research process (Creswell, 2007), bracketing the collected data and setting aside my views of organizational within the CSCU system.

Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) referred to the process of bracketing and setting
aside personal views as epoch. In order to set aside my personal views and clear my mind through the epoch process, I thought about my experiences and perceptions, both good and bad, of organizational culture within the CSCU system. Through the bracketing process, I meditated about the culture in the CSCU system, journaled, and allowed the preconceptions to “enter and leave my mind freely” (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 7). This process was repeated until I felt I could listen and hear the participants without inserting personal thoughts and feelings.

Research Questions and Goals

The following question guided the examination and informed the understanding of how Black female professionals perceive organizational culture: What are Black female professionals’ perceptions of their experience with organizational culture in the CSCU system? The primary goal of this research was to identify and understand Black female faculty and staff perceptions of campus culture in Connecticut. By identifying their perspectives and examining the lived experiences of Black women in higher education, the research may inform institutional administrators regarding the effect institutional policies and procedures, both good and bad, may have on black female faculty and staff interactions and presence on campuses. The second goal of this research was to obtain qualitative data on a racial and gender minority group: Black women.

Theoretical Framework

This research on Black women’s experiences and perceptions of organizational culture in the CSCU system required a critical lens. Thus, two theoretical frameworks grounded the study. The underlying theory of Edgar H. Schein’s organizational culture model was used as a guide to identify each prospective institution’s culture, while Patricia Hill Collins’ Black feminist thought was used as a second theory to illuminate the voice and experiences of the participants.
Individually, both theories had limitations in regards to the topic and research questions examined. Combined, organizational culture and Black feminist thought provided the latitude and grounding necessary to understand Black women's lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture in the CSCU system.

**Organizational Culture Model**

In his organizational culture model, Schein outlined the ways in which culture is created, immersed within an organization, and accepted by organization members. To identify and understand how culture affects Black women in higher education, an examination of the participants’ perceptions of the embedded institutional culture is paramount.

The organizational culture model focuses on “the role symbolism plays in organizational life” (Hatch, 2013, p. 161). Although organizational culture is rooted in social interactions, it is not exclusive as a social paradigm (Aten, Howard-Grenville & Ventresca, 2011; Hogan & Coote, 2014; Kathiravelu, Mansor, Ramayah, & Idris, 2013; Perrow, Reiss & Wilensky, 1986; Schein, 1984). Rather, this model also encompasses structural and non-verbal cues. Structurally, cultures materialize as symbols and artifacts (Schall, 1983; Schein, 1984) that contribute to organizational knowledge creation (Guillen, 1994; Kathiravelu, et. al, 2013), collective assumptions, innovation (Efrat, 2014), and employees’ perception of the organization and of themselves in relation to the organization. The contribution of cultural research as structural and non-verbal led to the organizational culture model.

As a theory, organizational culture deals with the inanimate constructs of an organization that dictate how members function within it. Schein (1984) posited that organizational culture manifests in three ways: artifacts, espoused values and beliefs, and basic assumptions.

Artifacts are the procedures, policies, ceremonies, rituals, language and jargon, symbols
and logos, and stories specific to the organization. Culture as artifacts encompasses
all the phenomena that you would see, hear, and feel… [including the] physical
environment, its language, its technology and product, its artistic creations, its style, as
embodied in clothing, manners of address, and emotional displays, its myths and stories
told about the organization… and its observable rituals and ceremonies. (Schein, 2010, p. 23).

Espoused values and beliefs are the justifications organization members make for their
behaviors, commitments, and ways of making meaning. Culture as espoused beliefs and values
refers to ideologies or organizational philosophy. Argyris and Schon (1978, 1996) attested that
organizational philosophy must align with organization members’ performance lest a
discrepancy between the espoused beliefs and values and the observable behaviors of the
organization persist.

Basic assumptions are the shared and often unspoken perspective and understandings of
the organization’s workings, as interpreted by its members. Culture as basic assumptions
encompasses the understandings and generalizations deduced by organization members as a
result of their perceptions and experiences with systematic artifacts and espoused values.

Organizational culture theory accounts for the relationship between an organization’s
members and the environment in which the organization is formed (Hatch & Zilber, 2011; Aten,
Howard-Grenville, Ventresca, 2011). Figure 1.1 shows the relationship between the three levels
and the ways in which culture is created and produced in an organization. This theoretical lens
considers both the inorganic and organic activity within an organization. In this sense, the
organizational culture becomes the standard by which behaviors, actions, deeds, and work
processes manifest themselves within the organization (Martin & Siehl, 1983; Morgan, 2006;
In this way, organizational culture becomes “a set of shared meanings that make it possible for members of a group to interpret and act upon” (Schein, 1984, p. 5). As a social paradigm, organizational culture focuses on influence (Guerin, 1995) and group dynamics; with group being identified as a set of people who have been together long enough to have shared significant problems, have had opportunities to solve those problems and observe the effects of their solutions, and have taken in new members (Schein, 1984, pp. 5-7).

In most cases, the dominant or majority group is the one that exerts the most influence and power over others (Bushman, 2013; Festinger, 1954; Williams & Taormina, 2001). The key
to understanding the dominance of one group and the subservience of another lies in the exploration of “the dynamic evolutionary forces that govern how the culture evolves and changes” (Schein, 1984, p. 3). Essentially, where controversy and schism exist, so does putrefaction within the organizational design and a need for change.

Schein (2010) cautioned that culture, “as a mechanism of social control … can be the basis of explicitly manipulating members into perceiving, thinking, and feeling in certain ways” (pp. 19-20). Thus, at the juncture of culture and social control is diversity, group dynamics, and the role majority versus minority plays in organizational operation (Schein, 2010).

Majority groups and minority groups within an organization may be constructed numerically, quantified by more or fewer members (Literte, 2011); influentially, determined by position and ability to corral others (Schein, 2010); or sociologically, determined by race, gender, socioeconomic status, and social order within the larger society (Sleeter, 2011). How organization members perceive and experience majority and minority groups not only influences how interpersonal relationships and interdepartmental interactions occur, but it also has a positive or negative effect on the lived experiences of individual organization members (Robbins & Judge, 2015).

At the heart of the discourse on majority and minority groups are three arguments: (a) that women, regardless of their ethnicity, struggle to obtain leadership positions (Forbes, 2000; Rooney, 2015; Catalyst, 2015); (b) that women of color are less likely to obtain leadership positions than their counterparts (Davidson-Hill, 1987; Grogan, 2010); and (c) that at the intersection of the race and gender diversity discourse is the Black woman. Combined, this means that discussing diversity, organizational culture, or perceptions of group dynamics, in higher education or any other discipline, cannot be achieved without considering the experiences
of the Black woman (Patricia Hill Collins, 1986).

While organizational culture theory provided the landscape for examining the culture of higher education as evident in institutional processes, the theory alone failed to provide a means through which Black women’s perspectives and lived experiences can be studied. Thus, a second theory, Black feminist thought, was needed to support the findings on organizational culture as experienced by Black women in higher education.

**Black Feminist Thought**

Given the nature of this research on Black women in higher education, using Black feminist thought as the primary theoretical lens was not only presumptuous but also traditional. Much of the research on Black women -- regardless of the discipline (e.g., sociology or education) -- studies Black women through a Black feminist thought theoretical lens (Barksdale, 2007; Dixson, 2003; Miles, 2012; Patton, 2009; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). The focus of this research was to identify and examine the phenomenon of culture as perceived and experienced by Black women. Thus, the use of Black feminist thought as a secondary lens offered the benefit of providing a framework for the researcher to begin to understand the duality of gender and race that Black women may face, and the role that duality plays in shaping Black women’s experience.

Hill-Collins (1989) asserted that “Black Feminist Thought articulates the taken-for-granted knowledge of African American women, it also encourages all Black women to create new self-definitions that validate Black women’s standpoint” (p. 750). The key was to not only capture the shared stories and experiences of Black women’s social inheritance and cultural historicity (Carlton Parsons, 2008), but to also provide credence and validity to those experiences in a scholarly way within the academy. Therefore, the duality of studying perceptions of
institutional culture, the lived experiences of Black women, and the influence of culture on the lived experiences of Black women emerged in the telling of first-hand accounts, and in the new understandings uncovered as a result.

Patricia Hill-Collins (2000) maintained that Black feminist thought highlights the various areas in which Black women are relegated within academia and without. Miles (2012) synthesized the tenets of Black feminist thought and identified six key features:

- Black women’s group location in intersecting oppressions produces commonalities among individual Black women,
- Black feminist thought emerges from a tension linking experiences and ideas,
- Black feminist thought is concerned with the connections between Black women’s experiences as a heterogeneous collectivity and any ensuing group knowledge or standpoint,
- Black feminist thought is concerned with the essential contributions of African American women intellectuals,
- Black feminist thought is concerned with the significance of change, and
- Black feminist thought is concerned with its relationship to other projects for social justice (p. 8).

These six factors afforded the researcher, an African American woman, the liberty and credibility to study and self-define experiences of Black women (Hill-Collins, 1989).

Additionally, Black feminist thought allowed the researcher “to produce facts and theories about the Black female experience that will clarify a Black woman’s standpoint for Black women” (Hill Collins, 1986, p. 516) and foster social change within an organization. Using Black feminist thought as a secondary lens along with organizational culture theory provided the means to
assess organizational culture through clearly hearing the voices of Black women.

Organizational culture theory and Black feminist thought provided the basis for exploring the research question: What are Black female professionals’ perceptions of organizational culture in the Connecticut State College and University system? The dual theoretical frameworks outlined guided this research into the influences organizational culture has on Black women’s lived experiences in the CSCU system. In so doing, the essence of institutional culture, as lived and perceived by Black women, was identified and examined.

**Organization of the Study**

The following sections of this study discuss the existing literature on diversity, education, and minorities in education. It also maps the methodology and participant selection used in the study. The subsequent sections are broken into four chapters: Literature Review, Research Design, Findings, and Interpretation. The Literature Review chapter is broken into two parts. The first part provides a detailed account of Blacks in America and is broken into sections, on Organizational Culture and Disaggregating the Term “Black.” The second part examines the Black experience in academia and is broken into six sections, on Black Women; Double Jeopardy; Barriers; Dealing with Barriers; Communities of Practice; and Identity, Place, and Perception. The Research Design chapter describes the steps taken to conduct the study. It is broken into sections on Methodology, Research Tradition, Data Collection and Analysis, Trustworthiness, and Limitations. The fourth chapter presents the researcher’s findings. The fifth chapter discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks. The chapter also provides recommendations for future research and provides the researcher’s reflections.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

An examination of current research is needed to effectively identify gaps in the existing literature on Black women in higher education and to provide a foundation for further study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief summary of the Black experience in academia in America and to define terms that apply to the research. The researcher synthesized peer-reviewed articles related to the minority experience in higher education. To effectively amalgamate the scholarly literature, the literature review is broken into three parts. The first part, A Historical Overview of Blacks in America, is divided into two sections: Organizational Culture and Climate and Disaggregating the Term “Black.” In this part, the researcher provides an overview of the Black experience in the United States; defines minority, diversity, and Black; and discusses how organizational culture manifests and influences organization members’ experiences and perceptions. The second part, Blacks in Higher Education, is divided into six sections: Black Women; Double Jeopardy; Barriers; Dealing with Barriers; Communities of Practice; and Identity, Place, and Perception. In this part, the researcher examines the Black woman’s experience in higher education. The third part, Summary, provides a conclusion and implications for research.

A Historical Overview of Blacks in America

A brief overview of the African-American experience in the United States is valuable to the intended research because it provides insight into how sociological and influential constructions inform the creation of minority versus majority group dynamics, as discussed in Chapter 1. Many scholars have examined the dexterity of access to education and employment within higher education amongst racial groups and have found that although Blacks access higher education more frequently than non-Blacks (Opp, 2000), they do not obtain college
degrees as easily or as regularly as non-Blacks (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, Bonous-Hammarth, 2000b; Blackwell, 1989; Evans & Chun, 2007). Therefore, fully understanding the access and attainment conundrum requires a brief discussion of the plight of African Americans in the United States.

During slavery in the 1800s, Blacks were barred from learning, academia, and paid employment. Some scholars have claimed that the ostracism of Blacks was designed to impose “Black subservience” (Dennis, 1998, p. 142) and to create a hierarchical structure of majority over minority, in which Blacks represented the minority (Covey & Lockman, 1996; Feagin, 1986; Latimore IV, 2012) and Whites the majority. Other scholars have claimed that the marginalization of Blacks from seeking employment and education also mentally enslaved them and made subservience an intergenerational state of mind that remains today (Allen, Teranishi, Dinwiddle, & Gonzalez, 2000a; Blackwell, 1989). The enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation provided physical freedom; however, scholars have maintained that mental bondage (Ruef & Fletcher, 2003) and European superiority ideologies persist (O’Connell, 2012) in academia and the corporate workplace. Though the Emancipation Proclamation freed Blacks from slavery in the 1860s, African Americans continued to be excluded from various opportunity structures, including education. Rulings from the 1890s, such as Plessy v. Ferguson, strengthened segregation by stipulating the need for Blacks to be separated from non-Blacks in society and education.

During the 1950s, however, Brown v. Board of Education (1954) found segregation unconstitutional and attempted to provide equal access to education for Blacks. Some have argued that Brown “had unintended consequences such as a precipitous drop in the number of African American teachers to serve as role models, competent professionals, and authority
figures for students” (Lyons & Chesley, 2004, p.298). This has been a point of contention for some scholars and administrators working in higher education, who have argued that the implementation Brown and affirmative action policies in the 1970s provided new opportunities for African Americans to seek employment in fields outside of education, thus fostering a shortage of minorities in higher education (Orlans, 1992).

In the 1960s, civil rights movements exposed discrepancies between Black education and non-Black education, aiming to create a critical consciousness of cultural oppression and inequity (Kholi, 2012) within the Black community. Although education became more accessible to Blacks in the 1970s, it has been heavily debated whether or not education was equal in quality to that of non-Blacks. Some scholars argued that, despite mainstream cultural dominance, Blacks could seek educational opportunities (Weinberg, 1977; Perry, 2003 as cited in Andrews, 2012). Other scholars posited that the marginalization of Blacks has been rooted in and propagated by an identity of underachievement (Andrews, 2012; Rong & Brown, 2001) that originated in slavery and perpetuated to create a system under which access, but not degree attainment, and employment, but not leadership, in higher education became the norms.

Despite the ideologies of Black underachievement and the adverse effects of Brown v. Board of Education, some Blacks accessed and obtained higher levels of education, changing mainstream perceptions of Black intellect and improving Black economic stability (Fairchild, 2009; Gray, 2013; Hutcheson, Gashman, & Sanders-McMurty, 2011). Indeed, more Blacks have obtained degrees and secure employment; however, a disproportionately low number of Blacks are teaching and working in higher education today (Strauss, 2016). Some scholars have attributed the lack of presence of Blacks in higher education to chilly organizational cultures and climates.
Organizational Culture and Climate

Organizational culture is defined as the shared assumptions and perceptions of organization members regarding the ways in which organizations provide opportunities for inclusion, innovation, and access (Schein, 2010). Organizational culture encompasses the prescriptive characteristics of organizational behavior (Robbins & Judge, 2015) and constitutes the basis of social order and of the rules that govern how events occur within individual organizations (Schein, 2010, p. 3). Moreover, organizational culture includes the way members delineate themselves to others, formulate perceptions of the organization (Robbins & Judge, 2015), and make meaning of the nuances informing and creating organizational practices and policies (Dachler & Hosking, 1995). Experiences, perceptions, and understandings of the inner workings of an organization’s culture are informed by an individual’s ontology (Carlton Parsons, 2008). Scholars across various disciplines have researched the ontological influences gender and race have on the lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture, maintaining that organizational culture dictates the organizational climate.

Climate refers to the ambiance of the organization or institution with regard to organization members’ perceptions of work units, management, efficiency, and inclusivity (Allan & Madden, 2006; Burke, 2014). Chilly climates are defined as exclusive, devaluing, and marginalizing (Maranto & Griffin, 2008) environments, while warm climates are perceived as inclusive, valuing, and innovative. Minorities in academia most often experience chilly climates (Fennell & Arnot, 2008; Perkins, 1993). Schein (2010) asserted that the majority group dictates the ebb and flow, the access and restrictions, and the culture and climate of an organization. Because Black faculty and staff are minorities in higher education, they may hold varying perspectives about the cultural climate and culture within an organization.
Ford (2011) identified the following roadblocks for minorities in higher education: chilly climate; issues of legitimacy; the level to which minorities are accepted and validated by others within the organization; balancing personal and professional roles; and the glass ceiling, which is an “invisible but formidable workplace barrier” (Green & King, 2001, p. 157). Validation for African Americans in higher education is either misdirected or non-existent (Evans & Chun, 2007). Balancing personal and professional roles are not challenges specific to minorities; however, when juxtaposed with issues of legitimacy, validation, and chilly climates, balancing personal and professional roles becomes more of a stressor (Maranto & Griffin, 2008) for minorities than non-minorities. Because these areas have been identified as stressors for minorities, understanding their perceptions may provide insight into why these stressors are stronger for minorities than others. This research therefore examined the perceptions of minority Black women regarding the influences organizational culture has on their lived experiences. Before delving into Blacks in higher education, the terms Black, minority, and diversity must be clearly defined and disaggregated.

**Disaggregating the Term “Black”**

The term Black is defined as “of or relating to a race of people who have dark skin and who come originally from Africa” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, electronic version). In many cases, however, Black refers to anyone with dark skin. Researchers have argued that to be Black in higher education -- whether as a student, faculty member, or staff member -- implies a state of being different (Pogue, 2013). A Black is a minority from a marginalized and smaller population or group (Grogan, 2010), an individual who partially fulfills an affirmative action quota (Orlans, 1992), and a spokesperson who must lead or represent the entire race (Du Bois, 1903). While there are Black Latin Americans, Black Caribbeans, and Black South Americans, this research
project intends to focus on Blacks -- Black women in particular, with African roots. Unlike Black Caribbeans, Black Latin Americans, and Black South Americans, Black Americans, or African Americans, are less likely to attain college degrees than Blacks originating from other countries (Rong & Brown, 2001). Therefore, disaggregating and identifying a precise definition of Black is vital to the examination of the perceptions African American women have regarding the influences organizational culture has on their lived experiences in academia.

As it relates to this research, the term Black refers to African Americans or individuals whose lineage derives from Africa (Chandra, 2006; Rong & Brown, 2001), who have shared social inheritance (Carlton Parsons, 2008), and whose experiences are rooted in the U.S. slave trade (Alleyne, 2004; Smith, 1992). This definition encompasses the historical, cultural, and racial characteristics of African Americans. Some scholars have posited that African Americans, unlike other Blacks, are more likely to experience microaggressions in both academia and the workplace as a consequence of not only racial discrimination but also of the historical undercurrent of Black inferiority rooted in slavery (Andrew, 2012; Miles, Hu, & Dotson, 2013). Consequently, for this review, the terms Black, Black American, African American, and Black minority are employed to describe African Americans in higher education.

**Blacks in Higher Education**

Research indicates that African Americans are underrepresented in degree attainment compared to other minorities and non-minorities. The research also shows that only 47% of Black women and 36% of Black men in the United States who seek higher education graduate within six years (Gray, 2013). Research suggests that Blacks are accessing education at the student level. The challenge with these figures, as posited by Gray (2013), is that they provide a flawed portrayal of Black presence on college campuses. When compared to other ethnicities,
Blacks lag behind dramatically in access to higher education and the attainment of degrees (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). A study conducted by Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, and Cantwell (2011) found that “African American… graduation rates lag 16 to 25% below the rates of Asian Americans and European Americans” (p. 312), although Pew (2014) ascertained there are more Blacks enrolled in postsecondary education than Whites.

The struggle for Blacks to obtain degrees has been attributed to universities failing to invest in and provide an organizational culture that fosters minority success (Gray, 2013), universities neglecting to understand the need for diversity and an environment conducive to and welcoming for minorities (Dumas-Hines, Cochran, & Williams, 2001), and the lack of minority faculty and staff on college campuses who can serve as role models (Cizek, 1995; Johnson & Thomas, 2012; Madkins, 2011; Miles & Dotson, 2013). To increase minority faculty and staff presence on college campuses, an assessment of organizational culture as perceived by minorities is needed to produce, affirm, and negate procedures, processes, and activities implicit or explicit in institutional culture (Espinoza & Shirin, 2014, p. 285) that negatively and positively influence the minority experience. Even though Black men and women share cultural experiences with chilly climates, problems of validation, issues of legitimacy, and hindrances in accessing positions in higher education because of race, researchers have suggested that Black women are more marginalized and overlooked than Black men (Ford, 2011; hooks, 2008; Washington, 1991). The identity of the Black woman in education is “partly shaped by recognition or its absence” (Taylor, 1992, p. 25 as cited in Ford, 2011).

**Black Women**

Research on Black women is most often conducted within the context of studies on racial or gender diversity (Patton, 2009). Few studies analytically include the intersectionality of the
Black woman, as her own entity, within the experience of higher education. Within the discourse on diversity in higher education, Black women’s “experiences are [either] viewed through the lens of White women or Black men” (Patton, 2009, p. 510), therefore suggesting that Black women must choose to either build a network of support via racial ties or gender ties. Critical race theorists have posited that understanding the Black woman’s predicament requires an understanding of the intersectionality of race and gender (Davidson-Hill, 1987). The duality of falling into two minority groups creates what sociologists and critical scholars refer to as double jeopardy.

**Double Jeopardy**

Double jeopardy, in this context, refers to the oppression inflicted upon Black women because of their gender and race (hooks, 1986). Hooks and McKinnon (1996) argued that the stressors of double jeopardy increase as Black women ascend to higher positions professionally. Jean-Marie, Williams, and Sherman (2009) revealed that “a primary source of stress for… [Black women in higher education] is derived from their experiences of racism and sexism” (p. 565). In many cases, race and gender are regarded as barriers and used as a barometer to label competence (Robinson, 2015).

**Barriers**

Race, gender, chilly climates, and double jeopardy constitute a few areas researchers have identified as barriers for minorities. These barriers represent a “social justice issue that requires a new courageous commitment to identifying and eliminating barriers” (Gray, 2013, p. 1245). Some scholars have contended that education is the key to economic security and identity (Ford, 2011) and that access to it lies at the very heart of “human entitlement irrespective of social or legal status” (Espinoza & Shirin, 2004, p. 285). Critiques of Blacks’ lack of access to
academia propose that there are limitations to what Blacks can accomplish in education and that they should, therefore, be granted access conditionally (Jencks & Riesman, 1967; Scalia, 2015). Black women who obtain employment in academia either assimilate into the mainstream cultural norms of their institutions (Hill-Davidson, 1987) or they “reconcile their less than fully empowered status… to secure their own advancement” (Johnson & Thomas, 2012, p. 65). Failure to assimilate or reconcile may result in being labeled as aggressive (Lang, 1992). Hooks (2008) argues these labels and barriers can be minimized through self-empowerment and the empowerment of others.

**Dealing with Barriers**

Johnson and Thomas (2012) ascertained that Black women in leadership positions negotiate power; consider their fluency operating in double jeopardy; adopt communities of practice (CoPs) to respond to the inconsistencies between societal, collegial, and systematic expectations and opportunities (Ngunjiri, Gramby-Sobukwe, & Williams-Gegner, 2012); and “from their marginal status, take into account their ability to form and secure positive relationships” (p. 65). Thus, they empower and facilitate a sisterhood with other Black women to transcend barriers (hooks & McKinnon, 1996; Jean-Marie, Williams & Sherman, 2010; King, 2001). Fostering networks of mentorship and support groups with other Black women (Evans & Chun, 2007; Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007) creates a socio-cultural paradigm through which Black faculty and staff members convene to bring meaning to their shared experiences and to understand those experiences collectively (Takahashi, 2010). The CoPs serve many purposes. They are sounding boards, places of refuge, and havens for brainstorming ways to interact with “others” (Ngunjiri, Gramby-Sobukwe, & Williams-Gegner, 2012). They are used as an instrument to connect students with faculty and staff (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell,
2011), and they provide a venue through which organizational leaders can begin to understand the barriers and opportunities influencing diversity on the campus (Dumas-Hines et al., 2001). The quandary with CoPs, however, is that even with them in place, some Black women struggle to find and establish spaces where they can discover mutual identification and warmth within chilly organizations because there are so few Black women professionals within the higher education system (Hall, 2006).

Identity, Place, and Perception

The presence of minority teaching and nonteaching faculty on college campuses directly impacts how faculty and staff perceive their place and identity within an institution. Perceptions of identity and place can negatively or positively contribute to minority faculty and staff retention, work effectiveness, buy-in to institutional goals (Moorman, Darnold, & Priesemuth, 2013), and organizational climate (Maranto & Griffin, 2008). Therefore, the perceptions of minorities on where and how they fit into an institution are just as vital as the environment that majority group faculty and staff members perceive, experience, and cultivate. Examining the experiences of diverse populations may provide opportunities for discourse that can “have a positive impact on classroom instruction and leadership” (Miles & Dotson, 2013, p. 74), on minority perceptions of institutional connectedness and on the development of CoPs. Understanding these experiences can lead to the development of mechanisms to help colleges begin to cultivate warm climates that are receptive to minorities and non-minorities alike (Smidts, Pruyn, & VanRiel, 2001).

Summary

This study examined Black female professionals’ perceptions of their experience with organizational culture in the CSCU system. The research introduced a cyclic concept whereby a
metaphorical revolving door (Lang, 1992) seems to exist through which Blacks are unable to secure degrees to an extent consistent with other minority and non-minority groups. The revolving door suggests that the number of Blacks allowed access to higher education (as students, faculty members, or staff members) is controlled by the majority group -- those with the power to construct policies and procedures (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson & Cantwell, 2011). The paradox is that if minority students do not graduate from college, minority faculty and staff will not be represented on campuses; if minority faculty and staff are not represented on campuses, minority students may not graduate, leaving Blacks knocking futilely at the door of education and employment freedom (Allen et al., 2000a, p. 3). Andrews (2012) solicited a call to action to address the imbalance of minorities in higher education and warned that, unless this incongruity changes, racial anomalies and imbalances in higher education will persist.

A survey of the literature identified organizational culture, validation, double jeopardy, and chilly organizational climates as potential areas that influence the Black woman’s experience in higher education. This study examined how perceptions of organizational culture influence Black women’s lived experiences. The results of the study provide vital insights into how institutional culture, in Connecticut, creates and dissuades an atmosphere conducive to inclusion and racial and gender diversity (Kholi, 2012).
Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter describes the methodology, research design, population sampling and recruitment, data collection, storage, analysis, trustworthiness, and limitations of the research. The study sought to identify, examine, and understand Black women’s lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture. Thus, the study required a qualitative approach and face to face interviews with participants in order to identify the perspectives of culture, examine the lived experiences, and include the participants’ voices. Creswell (2013) noted that, unlike quantitative studies, a qualitative study “includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem” (p. 37). The researcher has identified that a qualitative method is appropriate for this study.

The researcher surveyed a homogenous population, Black women, and chose to conduct a qualitative phenomenological study. Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of an occurrence. At the heart of this study was an attempt to recognize Black women’s lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture while working in higher education. The premise of this approach is that their shared experiences may provide insight into institutional practices and the lived experiences of Black female teaching and nonteaching faculty in Connecticut. In so doing, the true essence of organizational culture as lived, experienced, and perceived by Black women in Connecticut may materialize. A phenomenological methodology was an appropriate way to understand how Black women experience and see culture.

Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand Black female professionals’ perceptions of their experience with organizational culture in the Connecticut State College and University system.
Research Tradition, Philosophical Underpinnings, and Overview

Phenomenology is a philosophical construct in which an idea or concept is defined through subjects and relationships with the subject (Rapport, 2002, as cited in Dowling, 2007). As a philosophical paradigm, phenomenology “studies the essential character of consciousness in meaning-conferring acts” (Jennings, 1986, p. 1231). Essentially, phenomenology is the study of knowledge and awareness; it focuses on understanding rather than explaining phenomena (Sadala & Adorno, 2001), and it explores how an object comes to be and how a subject comes to know and understand. Edmund Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and Martin Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology constitute the two primary frames from which other phenomenological approaches derived and emerged.

Transcendental Phenomenology

Reawakening the dying philosophical rigor of the 19th-century, phenomenology was introduced by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (Dowling, 2007; Jennings, 1986). Husserl’s phenomenology is rooted in actuality and positivism. It focuses on absolute transcendental thought, free from bias and stripped of preconceived ideas and thoughts through reductive reasoning whereby *epoche* – “the experiencing of other minds through empathy” (Farber, 1943, p. 20) is achieved. The goal of transcendental phenomenological research is to describe a concept or phenomenon as experienced by an individual. In so doing, the researcher comes to understand the true essence of the perception. Husserl’s phenomenology beckons a return to world experiences and to the subject experiencing the world pre-reflexivity (Sadala & Adorno, 2001). Essentially, an experience does not exist without the subject, and the subject does not exist without the phenomenon or experience; therefore, “through the intentionality of consciousness all actions, gestures, habits, and human actions have meaning” (Sadala & Adorno, 2001, p. 283).
In this way, to get to the consciousness of actions, habits, and gestures, the researcher must strip away all pre-existing thoughts about the phenomenon, gather information in its rawest form, and describe it. Herein lies one of the key tenets of phenomenological studies, according to Husserl: uncovering the untainted consciousness of the subject, where meaning is made, to understand the phenomenon under investigation.

Phenomenology requires a departure from solely describing perspectives and lived experiences to getting at the essence of what the experiences and perceptions mean pre-reflexivity. Therefore, conducting a phenomenological study requires establishing clear processes for collecting, analyzing, and presenting the findings obtained from the data. For this study, the researcher conducted a Transcendental-Phenomenological study. Transcendental phenomenology affords the researcher the opportunity to identify the lived experiences of participants and uncover the essence of their perceptions of culture within the CSCU system. It is useful to use when the researcher has identified a phenomenon to understand, and has individuals who can provide a description of what they have experienced (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 23).

Understanding the ontological underpinnings of the participants’ ideas about institutional culture is essentially the purpose of this research; therefore, the approach calls for a “dynamic interplay” (Creswell, 2013, p. 59) between the research and the participants, the participants and the phenomenon, and the data and its interpretation. The goal of this transcendental phenomenological study was (a) to search for and interpret the essence of the participants’ experiences and perceptions via reflective analysis and bracketing and (b) present the findings whereby revelations uncovered will lead to a metaphorical understanding of the participants’ experiences and perceptions of organizational culture (Moustakas, 1994) in Connecticut.
Participants

This study explored Black female professionals’ perceptions of their experience with organizational culture in the CSCU system. It required a homogeneous population: participants had to speak English and identify as Black women. For this study, Black was defined as a person who is of African descent. A professional was defined as a person holding the positions of assistant to the director, assistant director, coordinator, director, dean, department chair, professor, their equivalent, or a higher rank.

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological studies require between 5 and 25 participants who have shared the same experience. The researcher interviewed seven participants, all Black women faculty and staff professionals. The population of interest was entry, mid-level, and senior faculty and staff members. Participants had to currently hold or have previously held (within the last five years) a professional level position within at least one student affairs or academic department (residence life, student life/activities, judicial affairs, Greek life, student services, counseling, diversity, professor, dean) at a public college or university in Connecticut. Participants also had to have a minimum of three years’ post-baccalaureate work in higher education. No preference was given to the participants’ age, sexual orientation, religious preference, or to the size or ranking of the institution (community college or four-year institution). Interested participants were excluded if they:

- did not self-identify as an African American woman with at least three years’ post-baccalaureate work in higher education,
- were not currently working or had not previously worked (within the last five years) in a student or academic affairs division at a college or university in Connecticut, or
- were currently holding an assistantship or internship in student or academic affairs.
The outlined exclusions assured consistency in the process of exploring the lived experiences of Black women faculty and staff and understanding how Black women faculty and staff professionals perceive organizational culture. Participants were excluded if they were neither Black women nor faculty or staff. The researcher used pseudonyms for the names of both the participants and the institutions.

**Recruitment and Access**

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants. This qualitative method of identifying participants was used because it allowed the researcher to select participants based on the objective of the research, and the identified criteria and characteristics required of participants (Sofaer, 1999). A call to participate, which included the criteria for participation, was emailed to the researcher’s friends and colleagues, posted on the researcher’s social media pages, and advertised through open professional social media pages. The statement regarding selection included: “Participation in this study is not guaranteed, but will be determined after completion of a five-minute Introductory Survey.”

A link to the introductory survey was provided in the email. The survey was implemented using Google Survey (an electronic tool). It included open and closed-ended questions that solicited demographical information unique to the study. A one-week timeframe was allotted for the introductory survey to be completed. Participants immediately received a confirmation receipt, thank you note, and notification that a decision about participation would be made by the following week.

Once the survey was completed, the data was reviewed, and based on the selection criteria, participants were selected, notified, and invited to participate via email. Participants were asked to confirm their willingness to move to the next phase of the study within three days.
of the e-mail receipt. The next step included a five-minute telephone call to discuss the purpose of the study, time commitment, compensation, contact information, and the scheduling of a 90-minute time slot for a more in-depth interview via telephone, Skype/Tango (online meeting tools), or in person. The participants dedicated approximately two hours over three weeks to the study.

The phases of the study were as follows:

1. A call to participate was issued.
2. A five-minute introductory survey was emailed to the respondents.
3. An invitation to participate attached with an informed consent form was emailed to the selected women.
4. A five-minute confirmation call was completed.
5. A 90-minute in-depth interview commenced.
6. Multiple email exchanges to confirm accuracy of transcription and analysis were completed (as needed).
7. A follow-up interview to review the data and verify interpretation and validity of findings was completed.

**Data Collection**

Phenomenological studies require multiple rounds of interviewing with the same subjects (Creswell, 2013). Thus, the researcher used two rounds of interviewing to collect the data. The first set of interviews was the longest and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The second round of interviews garnered additional information and obtained clarification of the data collected from the first interview. In addition to the two semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked participants to keep a five-day journal of their experiences and feelings throughout the workday.
and during meetings. Three of the seven participants submitted journal entries. In addition, the researcher kept notes of her experiences before, during, and after each interview. To provide participant anonymity, all participants and references to institutions received a pseudonym.

**Data Storage**

The interviews were audiotaped using the researcher’s mobile device and saved on Google Drive. Electronic copies of the transcribed interviews were kept, password protected on the researcher’s personal computer and Google Drive. Hard copies of the transcribed interviews, the participants’ and researcher’s journals, and all other supporting documents obtained from the participants were secured in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home office.

**Data Analysis**

In transcendental-phenomenological study, findings undergo three cycles of analysis. The first cycle of analysis: horizontalization, identifies specific statements from the transcripts that reveal information about the participants’ experiences and clusters them into major themes. (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 9). The second cycle of analysis: thematic analysis and the creation of textural and structural descriptions, synthesizes the major themes into a description of each participant. The third and final cycle of analysis: creation of a composite description, describes the meanings and essence of the participants’ lived experiences and perceptions. Given that the focus of this phenomenological study was to understand how Black women perceive and experience organizational culture in the CSCU system, this three-cycle analysis process was adopted.

To limit bias, the collected data was transcribed by a third-party vendor. The third-party vendor was emailed the audio recordings and asked to transcribe the data verbatim and submit the transcription via email within 48 to 72 hours. After employing epoch, the researcher read
each transcribed dataset and followed up with the third-party transcriber, as needed, to confirm or clarify. The transcribed data was then emailed to the participants for member checking and validation. Participants were given 24 to 48 hours to review and provide feedback on the transcripts. After receiving confirmation from the participants, the researcher reread all of the transcripts and listened to the interview recordings to identify words and phrases that emerged repeatedly throughout each interview. Instead of using electronic software to assist with the data analysis, the researcher opted to analyze and code the data by hand. This process initiated cycle one of analysis: horizontalization.

During cycle one, the researcher after becoming mindful of bias, examined each dataset independently and highlighted words and phrases that recurred. By analyzing the textual descriptions autonomously, the researcher came to understand each participant’s perceptions and experiences using the participants’ own language. This process is known as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994) and provides vital information about each participant. During this phase of analysis, the researcher sought to learn how the participants viewed the term, organizational culture.

Table 1 identifies the 38 significant statements shared by the participants. The statements were deduced from the transcripts and included sentences and phrases. The statements were not grouped or placed in any order, rather the statements simply provided details about the phenomenon, organizational culture as perceived and experienced by the participants.
### Selected Significant Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“So there are lots of differences, I don’t think we have one blended culture… by blended, I mean where everyone is doing the same thing targeting one culture, one goal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“There are absolutely... absolutely different rules for different groups and different people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“There is a lack of sensitivity and understanding... of people from diverse backgrounds, particularly Black people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“For the most part... the relationships that I build are more so because of my position.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“When there’s someone who looks like [you] you’re almost inclined to... connect with them and so I do think there’s a lacking of that... there’s certain things that I can talk to... about that, I won’t so be able to talk to... or... about because... they just wouldn’t get it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“When I first came, I really almost felt like I was stepping back into some kind of like... backward, very local, very locally run... not progressive-minded.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“In the last 10 years the spirit of the campus has become more professional, [but] the spirit of the correction wasn’t very professional... I mean it wasn’t really a professional climate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“untrusting of minority leadership... surprised to see Black leadership, ... suspect of Black leadership, and, minority leadership in general.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“if you want to be recognized, you have to put yourself out there and say that... I did this, I did that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>“there’s a level of communication that... I don’t find here... among Black people... there’s a rapport or recognition that for whatever reason is different.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>“I said, ‘oh, that’s all right’ and I found another position... at City College. I was like, if people don’t appreciate the work I’m doing there, then [I] might as well work here.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>division between faculty and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>lack of appreciation for staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. “we know there are different rules for us as Black females, and how people perceive us, versus others”
15. “people are rewarded... people are recognized for their good work”
16. “if you don’t let people know what you want... what you’re interested in then nobody will... see you and seek you out”
17. “we don’t have a lot of Blacks... clerical is usually very diverse”
18. “the sad part is that we notice it, when it’s all Black, but we don’t notice, or make any comments when it’s an all-White office.”
19. “we need to look more like the students we serve, because we don’t.”
20. “I’ve been on the most search committees probably in the whole college, but that’s because I’m a Black female, and because, you know I’m part of a certain union, but I literally, I think I’ve been on the most out of anybody.”
21. “we need to recruit more diverse faculty.”
22. “I was always fighting people who didn’t have the knowledge that I had to implement a... services department, it was a fight from day one, and I’m still fighting that battle.”
23. “It’s very racist here, and you’re going to experience a lot of racism here, and the best way to stay connected is to stay with us.”
24. “before we can get to elevating the college and the college experience for students, faculty, and staff... we have to take leadership in education... we need to acknowledge that this practice is discriminatory and it’s time to change it... people of color on the campus at Truth... have to fight change on that level before we can get into taking... the college into the, next millennium.”
25. “There are people who can ask for things... but... a person of color, asks for something...”
26. “it’s always a problem... I think there will always be some people who rules will apply to because of who they are and the color of their skins.”
27. “the number one rule: Don’t be an angry Black woman”
28. “it’s always been a struggle, depending on... who is in... administrative leadership at that time... people block, and sabotage”
29. “very few diversity classes, maybe two”
After identifying the significant statements via the horizontalization process, *In Vivo* coding method was used to collocate the repeated and overlapping (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004) phrases and statements. *In Vivo* coding is a qualitative method that “prioritizes and honors the participant’s voice” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 74). This step initiated cycle two of analysis: thematic analysis. Using the *In Vivo* coding method, which required the researcher to assign a “code” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to each phrase or significant statement, the phrases and statements that recurred identified 21 codes. Table 2 shows the 21 codes assigned to the
datasets.

Table 2.

*Initial Codes from the Participants’ Statements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Socializing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invisibility</td>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>Duality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Duality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Adapting</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and Procedures</td>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Appearance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These initial codes were e-mailed to the participants for review. The participants had 48 hours to review and make corrections via email. The participants provided feedback as needed. Upon completion of member checking, the researcher initiated thematic analysis.

Using thematic analysis; a method of coding that required the initial codes to be grouped in themes or meaning units (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 9) the researcher continued to review and compare the data using bracketing and reduction method which allowed for reevaluation and re-coding (Boeije, 2002). Through bracketing and reduction (Moustakas, 1994) the researcher compared, analyzed, and grouped the codes identified in cycle one into clusters. Subsequently, the codes revealed three clusters: diversity, leadership, and relationships. Table 3 shows how the initial codes were clustered.

Table 3.

*Cluster Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster Code</th>
<th>Initial Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Opportunity, Communication, Support, Rules, Recognition Policies and Procedures, Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Invisibility, Fatigue, Duality, Diversity, Appearance, Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Mentoring, Belonging, Racism, Advocacy, Relationship, Adapting, Involvement, Socializing,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Upon identifying the three clusters, the researcher compared the clusters with the significant statements portrayed in Table 1 and three themes 1) lack of diversity, 2) importance of leadership, and 3) importance of relationship emerged. These three themes revealed the essence of the participants’ perceptions and experiences of organizational culture. Table 4 identifies the emergent themes and the supporting evidence from the participants’ significant statements.

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Evidence in Participants’ Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Leadership</td>
<td>“So there are lots of differences, I don’t think we have one blended culture... by blended, I mean where everyone is doing the same thing targeting one culture, one goal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“it’s always been a struggle, depending on... who is in... administrative leadership at that time... people block, and sabotage”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The leadership here... was a part of the culture... the head is always important. Where the head goes, the tail follows, and at the time, the head of this institution... was very ineffective in terms of setting a tone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“the system here, in recognizing people is... political, in a lot of ways, and you have to document everything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“if you want to be recognized, you have to put yourself out there and say that... I did this, I did that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“people are rewarded... people are recognized for their good work”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“the number one rule: Don’t be an angry Black woman”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Diversity</td>
<td>“It’s very racist here, and you’re going to experience a lot of racism here, and the best way to stay connected is to stay with us.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There is a lack of sensitivity and understanding... of people from diverse backgrounds, particularly Black people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“When there’s someone who looks like [you] you’re almost inclined to... connect with them and so I do think there’s a lacking of that... there’s certain things that I can talk to... about that, I won’t so be...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the thematic analysis, the researcher used the three-step Transcendental phenomenological methodology to present the data: textual description, structural description, and composite description. Textural description was used to describe what each participant
experienced (Creswell, 2013). Once the textural description was complete, the researcher moved on to structural description. Structural description was used to review and describe how the participants experienced organizational culture (Creswell, 2013). The textural and structural descriptions emergent across the datasets identified the three themes and commonalities that led to the essence of the participants’ perceptions of organizational culture and lived experiences working in the Connecticut college and university system. Upon completion of the textural and structural descriptions, the meaning points were emailed to the participants to review. The participants were given 48 hours to review the themes and provide feedback. If participants did not provide corrections or clarification within 48 hours, the researcher assumed no corrections were required and proceeded to the third and final phase.

After these two steps were completed, the researcher created a composite description to reflect the essence of the participants’ experience. Collectively, the descriptive textual and structural data provided insight into what the participants experienced (Creswell, 2013). The interpretation of the textual and structural data not only identified the three emergent themes reflected in the data but uncovered the essence of the lived experiences and perceptions of Black female teaching and nonteaching faculty. The data collection, analysis, and findings reflected how the phenomenon under examination was experienced and understood by the participants.

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher used participant checking to verify and confirm accuracy in the interpretation and presentation of the data. The researcher also worked to develop trust and transparency with the participants by assuring them full respect for their anonymity and by providing participants with the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher adopted the online survey protocol from research tested and conducted by Sandra Miles (2012).
The researcher acknowledged her bias and used journaling before, during, and after the interviews, in conjunction with participant checking and *epoch*, to bracket personal bias and influence in data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013).

**Protection of Human Subjects**

A total of seven participants met all selection criteria and agreed, after proper disclosures, to participate in this study. Once participation was confirmed pseudonyms were identified for each of the seven women included in the study. The participant pseudonyms were chosen by the researcher and approved by each participant. The names “Ida Mae”, “Florence”, “Sula”, “Nel”, “Eva”, “Hannah”, and “Peacola” were selected for the participants. Pseudonyms for the institutions from which participants’ hail were also selected. The names “New Community College”, “City Community College”, “Truth Community College”, “Progressive Community College”, and “CSCU system”, were chosen to identify the institutions represented.

**Limitations**

Two limitations were identified during the study process. The main limitation surfaced as a result of the sample pool. The goal of the study was to examine the lived experiences of Black female professionals working in the CSCU system. The call to participate yielded respondents only from CSCU community colleges. Without the representation of faculty and staff from the 4-year institutions or the public on-line institution, the results of the study were limited to the Connecticut community colleges. The second limitation manifested in the completion and collection of the participant journals. Each participant was asked to complete a 5-day journal using a notebook provided by the researcher. Three participants handed in journal entries, but the other four did not. Of the three journals returned, one did not contain usable data as the participant failed to answer the journal prompts and provide introspection on her daily
experiences. As a result, the journal entries were excluded from the researcher’s evaluation and analysis process.

**Delimitations**

The researcher identified two delimitations:

- The study focused on the perspectives and lived experiences of Black female professionals.
- The study focused on Black females with 3 or more years of non-clerical experience in the CSCU system.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the limitations, trustworthiness, data collection, storage and analysis process, participant selection criteria, and methodology used to obtain, examine, and present the findings of this research. Using the transcendental phenomenological three-cycle analysis process: 1) horizontalization, 2) thematic analysis and the creation of textural and structural description, and 3) composite description, the researcher analyzed the data and uncovered the essence of the participants’ perceptions and experiences. The details of the findings are discussed in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Findings

This research examined the lived experiences and perceptions of seven Black women working in the Connecticut State College and University (CSCU) system. The qualitative phenomenological study examined the professional, personal, and cultural experiences and perceptions of organizational culture as lived by the participants. Phenomenological studies focus on capturing, amalgamating, and deducing individuals’ perceptions, thoughts, and realities to uncover the collective and shared experiences of the participants and reveal the essence of the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2007). The purpose, to understand Black female professionals’ perceptions of their experience with organizational culture in the CSCU system, provided an opportunity for the researcher to assess the successes and areas of improvement related to the culture for Black women in the CSCU system. Thus, the goal of this qualitative research was to “understand [the] particular experiences [of Black women] and how such lived experiences might contextualize social conditions…” (Mogadime, Mentz, Armstrong, Holtam, 2010, p. 816) and organizational culture. The researcher sought to understand the meaning of the participants’ experiences with organizational culture.

The following question guided the research: What are Black female professionals’ perceptions of their experience with organizational culture in the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system? This chapter provides an overview of the participants, the findings yielded from an online survey and from in-person and telephone interviews.

Background

Participant selection for this study began in earnest during the summer of 2016. African American females who self-identified as such and were employed at the time or within the last 5 years at one of the Connecticut state colleges and universities as an assistant director, director,
professor, counselor, coordinator, or their equivalent, were identified using a call to participate (Appendix A) posted to the researcher’s Facebook page and emailed within the researcher’s network of contacts. The initial posting and call to participate yielded 13 respondents. The 13 respondents were invited to take an online introductory survey (Appendix B) to further determine eligibility.

**Introductory Survey Distribution and Data Collection**

The introductory survey was emailed to the 13 individuals who responded to the call to participate. The introductory survey aimed to capture demographic information such as race and ethnicity, age, gender, and affiliation with colleges and universities within the CSCU system. The information gathered from the introductory survey was used to select the participants for this research. Of the 13 respondents, 10 took the survey. Subsequently, the researcher sent an email reminder to the remaining three respondents inviting them to take the introductory survey, but none acquiesced. Of the 10 who took the survey, two did not meet the criteria for participation, as it was unclear from their responses whether they were, in fact, formerly or currently employed at one of the 12 community colleges or four public universities in Connecticut. The third respondent was withdrawn from participation for personal reasons.

The remaining seven respondents met the selection criteria and were subsequently emailed individually a “selection to participate” notification (Appendix C). The “selection to participate” asked them to confirm their willingness to continue with the study by scheduling a five-minute confirmation phone call. All but one of the confirmation correspondences were completed via telephone. An exception occurred with one participant whose confirmation was completed via face to face conversation. During the confirmation correspondences, the researcher confirmed the respondents’ further participation, reviewed details about the research,
answered any questions the respondents had, and scheduled the 90-minute in-depth interview.

The researcher conducted six in-person interviews and one telephone interview. Each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes. As noted in Chapter 3, each participant and their respective institution received a pseudonym. The results of each of the interviews are presented in this chapter.

**Demographics**

The participants in this study included seven higher education professionals from four Connecticut community colleges. The demographic identifiers captured during the introductory survey revealed that all reported their gender (female), their race/ethnicity (Black/African American), their professional status (current faculty or non-clerical staff), and their age (ranging from 26 to over 60. The survey did not ask about sexual orientation or religious affiliation. Participants had a minimum of 3 years’ experience in the CSCU system.

The CSCU system encompasses 12 community colleges, one online college, and four universities:

- Asnuntuck Community College, Enfield
- Capital Community College, Hartford
- Charter Oak State College, Online
- Gateway Community College, New Haven
- Housatonic Community College, Bridgeport
- Manchester Community College, Manchester
- Middlesex Community College, Middletown
- Naugatuck Valley Community College, Waterbury
- Northwestern CT Community College, Winsted
Norwalk Community College, Norwalk
Quinebaug Valley Community College, Danielson
Three Rivers Community College, Norwich
Tunxis Community College, Farmington
Central Connecticut State University, New Britain
Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic
Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven
Western Connecticut State University, Danbury

Participants were selected based on their self-identification as Black females and employment at either one of the 12 state community colleges, the online college, or one of the four universities. Respondents employed at the University of Connecticut (UCONN) were not eligible to participate, as UCONN is not a part of the CSCU System. While the researcher solicited participation from four-year institutions, no women fitting the criteria responded. As a result, the institutions represented in this study include four community colleges in Connecticut.

A summary of each participant is provided in the narrative below.

**Ida Mae**

Ida Mae, the youngest participant in this study, is a native of North Carolina. She has a master’s degree and holds a full-time staff level position at Progressive Community College. Ida Mae has worked for the CSCU system for 4 years.

**Florence**

Florence is a native of Maryland. She has a master’s degree and credits towards a doctoral degree. Florence is a faculty member at Progressive Community College and has worked in the CSCU system for 5 years.
Sula

Sula is a native of Connecticut. She has a master’s degree. She holds a management level position at New Community College. Sula has worked in the CSCU system for 4 years.

Nel

Nel is a native of Connecticut. She has a master’s degree and is pursuing a doctoral degree. She holds both an adjunct and full-time staff level position at City Community College. Nel has more than 10 years’ experience in the CSCU system.

Hannah

Hannah is a native of Connecticut. She has a master’s degree. Hannah holds both a full-time staff level position at Truth Community College and an adjunct faculty position at Progressive Community College. Hannah has worked in the CSCU system for 4 years.

Eva

Eva is a native of North Carolina. She has a master’s degree. She currently works at Progressive Community College as an adjunct instructor. Eva has more than 20 years’ experience working in higher education. She has worked at a 4-year university and a community college in the CSCU system.

Peacola

Peacola is a native of New York. Peacola has a master’s degree. She holds a full-time faculty position at Progressive Community College. Peacola has well over 10 years’ experience working in the CSCU system.

Table 5 provides demographic and institutional information on each participant.
Each interview was transcribed by a third-party vendor and analyzed by the researcher using three cycles of analysis that included *In Vivo* coding, thematic analysis, and bracketing and reduction. The codes identified during the phases of analysis are examined in this chapter and provide the foundation through which the three themes: 1) lack of diversity, 2) importance of leadership, and 3) importance of relationships emerged.

In this section, textural descriptions taken from each participant’s verbatim transcripts are used to highlight their lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture. Following these textural descriptions, structural descriptions are presented for each participant. The structural descriptions explain how the participants’ responses created the themes identified by the researcher after multiple rounds of reading and analyzing each individually transcribed interview. Later in the chapter, the amalgamation of the textural and structural descriptions
provides a composite textural-structural description that leads to the essence of the lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture for all the participants working in the CSCU system (Moustakas, 1994).

**Participant 1: Ida Mae**

**Textual description.** When asked about organizational culture, Ida Mae identified, rules, relationships, and a lack of diversity and understanding as factors contributing to her perceptions and experiences of the culture within the system. She used words such as “torn,” “lack,” “opportunity,” “rules,” “don’t care,” and “offensive” to describe her experience. She identified that are “different rules for different groups and different people.” She explained that Black women must go “above and beyond,” be “more outspoken and … known,” and “liked by people who are more important,” in to receive “opportunities… to grow… advance… [and] develop.” She explained that in addition to going “above and beyond,” the rules change depending on “what department you work in, [and] who your supervisor” is. She maintained “unless [your] boss pumps it up, [you’re] not going to get” recognized” and if you are not recognized “then they don’t see you.”

She explained that being seen and obtaining recognition, for Black women, is difficult because 1). “as Black women, we’re a little bit more timid and a little bit less than inclined to say I’ve been doing all of these things and there’s this position coming up or I’m really looking for advancement and growth,” 2). there is “a lack of sensitivity and understanding… of people from diverse backgrounds, particularly Black people,” and 3). “I don’t think they understand, that they care to understand… where individuals from diverse backgrounds are coming from or how they do their work.” She explained they say “race doesn’t matter…[and] they want to be colorblind which means… to say they’re colorblind and race doesn’t matter… you’re almost ignoring the
fact that there are differences and that there are issues that should probably be addressed.” She identified one of the issues as being “straight-up racist.” She shared “there are few people on campus that have been bold enough to make comments that are offensive for me as a Black woman.”

Because of the lack of sensitivity and understanding, Ida Mae identified that she has difficulty cultivating needed relationships. She maintained, “I find myself kind of stopping… not saying certain things or not doing certain things because I won’t really be understood.” “I feel like if there [were] more Black women on campus, I would have more friends on campus… my social experience… [would] be… different because there [would] be women that I [could] talk to about things that related to me.” She maintained, as Black women “we see each other in a way where it’s… I have your back” and “if something were to happen or if I were to feel... uncomfortable or if I needed someone to talk to, I know that I could go to them and just talk to them and know that they would understand.”

**Structural description.** Ida Mae discussed organizational culture within the context of basic assumptions and values. She focused her discussion on roles Black women have, rules for Black women, and organizational members’ perceptions of diverse populations. She spoke about how organizational recognition of accomplishments and contributions made by Black women is lacking. She also talked about the racist assumptions organizational members have towards Black women. Ida Mae believed that having other Black women on campus for comradery and support would directly alter her perspectives of the culture within the CSCU system. Without the presence of other Black women on campus, Ida Mae experienced invisibility and perceived the culture to be “very torn” and “lacking.”

**Participant 2: Florence**
Textual description. When asked about organizational culture, Florence identified leadership, advocacy, and the environment as factors contributing to her perceptions and experiences of the culture within the system. She used words such as “closed,” “disconnected,” “untrusting,” “unprofessional,” “marginalized,” and “demoralizing.” Florence talked about the lack of “faculty diversity,” “the level of understanding,” the “total rejection of the whole concept [of diversity],” the lack of “multicultural or intercultural” pedagogy, and the ways in which Blacks are perceived by organizational leaders and members. She explained that organizational members are “friendly towards minorities,” but “untrusting of minority leadership,” “surprised to see Black leadership,” and “suspect of Black leadership and minority leadership in general.” She maintained that organizational leaders lack understanding of diverse populations citing two incidents: 1). a dean referred to a Black man as “the diversity on his search committee” and 2). a dean said, her hairstyle could be viewed as “hostile” and she should consider straightening it.

Similarly, Florence expressed that organizational leaders fail to acknowledge and recognize “the right things.” She defined the right things as “all of the professional things, all of the teaching things” that organizational members accomplish. She contended “if you want to be recognized, you have to put yourself out there and say that… I did this, I did that.” She discussed in detailed the process for recognition via applying for promotion and tenure. She shared that she had applied for promotion three times and tenure once. She explained, even though she received promotion and tenure the third try, the two previous denials, and the lack of recognition for the work and service she provided to the institution made her to feel “unappreciated” and “demoralized.” She explained, “I was like, if people don’t appreciate the work I’m doing there [Progressive Community College], then [I] might as well work here [City Community College].” She elaborated, “it is demoralizing in a sense… the morale of the individual can go down…you
know, I can’t really commit to someone who won’t, doesn’t see the value in what I’m doing.”

Florence attributed her experiences and perceptions to the “attitude of the people” and the culture. She ascribed that the institution has “a long way to go,” but “as [the institution] gets more diverse faculty and staff [the culture] will change.”

**Structural description.** Florence discussed organizational culture within the context of basic assumptions. She focused her discussion on leadership, perceptions of Black Women, and the presence of diverse faculty and staff on campus. She discussed member and leadership perceptions of Black women. She spoke of instances when her appearance was called into question, and when she had to speak up for herself and prove her worth as a professor deserving of promotion and tenure. Florence also shared stories that highlighted what she perceived to be a lack of professionalism and “progressive thinking.” The lack of diversity and understanding, and the need to self-advocate contributed to Florence’s experiences and perception that the CSCU system needs more faculty and staff diversity.

**Participant 3: Nel**

**Textual description.** When asked about organizational culture, Nel identified leadership, diversity, and relationships as factors contributing to her experiences and perceptions working in the CSCU system. She used words such as “advocate,” “overlooked,” “appreciated,” “diversity,” and “different rules,” to describe her experience. She talked about being recognized and feeling appreciated by institutional leadership, faculty and staff diversity, the importance of self-advocacy, being “social,” and understanding that there are “different rules” for Black women than there are for others.

She explained that there are unwritten rules for Black women that dictate dress code and the process for advancement. She elaborated by sharing a conversation she had with a Black
female colleague about the difference between how White women dress for work and how Black women must dress for work.

Not that there’s any written rule… we were [having]… a lighthearted conversation … not joking, but sort of joking, and she said, “You know, what’s up with that, I mean, she [a White female] gets to wear leggings and jeans to work, I think I should get to wear jeans and leggings to work.” And, I said to her, we are not on the train, and we will not be wearing leggings and jeans to work… because we’re not on that train. We’re on a different train, and we can’t wear jeans and leggings to work. We could, but we’re not going to, because we know there are different rules for us as Black females, and how people perceive us, versus others.

Nel maintained that these unwritten rules also apply to opportunities for advancement. She explained that although “people are rewarded…[and] people are recognized for their good work,” she learned to advance she must build relationships and make an extra effort to “have a good rapport with them,” and “let people know what you want… what you’re interested in.” Nel contended that “if you don’t [self-advocate] then nobody will… see you and seek you out” and you will be “overlooked.” She shared that “at one point I felt like I was being overlooked [for] a position.”

In addition to feeling that she was overlooked at times and describing the unwritten rules for Black women, Nel perceived diversity to be “an issue” on her campus. She explained the leadership “talked about [it] in our strategic planning committee… did a survey, and… [the] need [for] more diverse faculty and staff [came up]” even still “we don’t have a lot of Blacks.” She described pockets of diversity within specific departments and expressed that, “the sad part is that we notice it, when it’s all Black, but we don’t notice, or make any comments when it’s an
all-White office.”

**Structural description.** Nel discussed organizational culture within the context of basic assumptions and values. She identified that there was a lack of diversity at City College and explained that the lack of diversity was an institutional issue that created different and unwritten rules for Black women. Nel perceived these rules to be an embedded norm that dictated how she as a Black woman working in system must dress, and act to advance professionally. Understanding the rules as they pertained to her as Black woman seemed to be important as it directly contributed to Nel’s perceptions and experiences in the system.

**Participant 4: Sula**

**Textual description.** When asked about organizational culture, Sula discussed leadership and diversity at New College. She used words such as “increase,” “supported,” and “valued.” She explained, “we don’t have… a whole lot [of diversity] … I mean, we have like the clerical staff and the maintenance staff, that’s where you would find probably the most color… we need to recruit more diverse faculty…” “We have more white female than anything on campus.” She acknowledged, “we know that’s something that we need to strive to, to increase… and that’s also been in conversations that have been happening… at my level, in strategic planning.” Sula explained that even though there is a lack of diversity on her campus she did not have any “negative experiences where [she] felt like it was because [she was] a Black woman.” She shared that she has “positive interactions with… folks on campus who do not look like me.”

Sula explained that although New College lacks faculty and staff diversity, the leadership at the college is “very supportive,” and “encourages,” “fosters,” and “empowers” employees with “leadership development” opportunities. She shared that her president “has sent… many women to the Herr’s Leadership Institute… for Higher Education.”
**Structural description.** Sula spoke about the lack of diversity at New College and the role institutional leaders play in creating an environment where all employees feel supported and appreciated. She shared that the support and encouragement of the institution’s president positively affected her lived experiences as a Black woman working at New College.

**Participant 5: Hannah**

**Textual description.** When asked about organizational culture, Hannah discussed diversity, relationships, and leadership. She used words such as “stressful,” “resistance,” “racism,” “code shifting,” and “oblivious” to describe her experience. She shared “it’s very racist here,” there are “subtle rules… rules that aren’t necessarily in writing,” “rules [that] exist…for different people.” She explained that, refrain from “making waves,” be deliberate not to “piss somebody off,” and “don’t be an angry Black woman” were unwritten rules at Truth. She noted:

that’s the number one rule at, at Truth. Don’t be perceived as angry Black woman, because if you’re perceived as an angry Black woman, you know… you’re not going to get what you need, you’re not going to get promoted, you’re not going to get tenure. It’s like stay under the radar, you know, don’t make any waves, don’t make any noise and you’ll survive professionally, you know, at this institution.

Hannah maintained that these rules not only affect whether one advances professionally or not, but whether one is hired for employment. She described:

we had an African American dean of students get hired… the school was in an uproar over that, and there were questions, and when they were challenged… they were like, “Well, we don’t hire people of color because, you know, we can’t find qualified candidates.”

She also explained that people of color “struggle, depending on… who is in…
administrative leadership at that time” to be recognized and accepted because “people block, and sabotage.” Thus, people of color are “always fighting people… fighting a battle.”

Hannah maintained that cultivating relationships with “other faculty members of color,” “code shifting,” and “constantly learning about people… and ways… to challenge” derogatory and degrading comments was essential. She admitted that she had to “wrestle with the dual self” and accept that to work in the CSCU system means “there has to be two me’s” and “I need to adapt my shade of being to the color of that environment.”

**Structural description.** When asked about organizational culture, Hannah discussed racism and the struggles people of color experience at Truth Community College. She communicated frustration with racism and rules. Hannah identified that building relationships with other people of color is needed to “fight” the racism experienced on campus. The stories and perspectives regarding opportunities for people of color, and bouts with “duality” and “code shifting” collectively contributed to her lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture in the CSCU system.

**Participant 6: Eva**

**Textual description.** When asked about organizational culture, Eva’s responses focused on invisibility, opportunity, and ambiguous policies and procedures. She used words such as “underground,” “tight,” “exclusive,” “difficult,” and “networks” to described the culture in the CSCU system. Eva explained that there is an “underground system, pipe where people in the know, people in the circle… know how to maneuver through situations, they know how to get things done,” and “how opportunities [are] made available or not made available.” She shared the “people in the know” know “who to go to, and they have networks, communication networks… you’re never really privy” to. Eva explained that “there’s no rule book” for the
“underground system.” Therefore, there are “unwritten rules” that produce “silos,” discourages “cross-socialization,” and makes it “difficult” for “people of color… [to get] promotion and tenure,” and to “be seen.”

Eva acknowledged, “I could have, an impression, or perception that sometimes I am seen as invisible.” She defined “invisible” as “not being offered opportunities to serve on a committee, not being offered an opportunity to advance.” She explained that even though she had experience teaching in higher education she had to build relationships by “being visible, attending their events, attending committee meetings, showing up for health fairs, showing up for psychology fairs, being visible and observing.” She stressed the importance of putting herself out there and saying, “Think of me! Think of me, I’m available.” She explained, that “those are the relationships that have to be built in the absence of anyone being there to mentor you.” Eva shared, even with the attempts at being visible and self-advocating, “it took almost 20 years to get back into” teaching.

**Structural description.** When asked about organizational culture Eva discussed the ways in which subtle and unwritten rules caused her to feel invisible. She expressed the importance of self-advocating and making herself visible. She maintained that making herself visible was essential in helping her build the relationships required to secure positions within the system. Eva explained that building relationship, even “in the absence of a mentor” is vital. Without a mentor or a written rule book, Eva perceived the culture to be “an underground system pipe” in which she was not “privy” to be a part of. Each of these factors contributed to Eva’s lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture in the CSCU system.

**Participant 7: Peacola**

**Textual description.** When asked about organizational culture, Peacola’s responses
focused on leadership and invisibility. She used words such as “tough,” “toxic,” “fatigue,” “uncomfortable,” “invisibility,” “rejection,” and “unhappy” to describe the culture at Progressive Community College. She explained, “although there are a lot of people in the community who come to this institution, most of their instructors and administrators do not look like them… and it’s frustrating.” She maintained that the institution needed to move past talking about faculty and staff diversity towards hiring more faculty and staff of color, and being more inclusive. She also maintained that “the administrative team, made decisions that pitted people against each other” which caused the culture to be “toxic.”

She asserted “where the head goes, the tail follows, and… in terms of setting a tone” the leadership at Progressive Community College cultivated a culture where recognition and relationship building was difficult. She explained, “the system here, in recognizing people is… political, in a lot of ways, and you have to document everything” or else “nobody seems to know, or nobody seems to notice… [the] great and positive impact” people make. Peacola believed the “the proof is in the pudding” and the leadership played a significant role in recognizing employees and defining the culture.

Peacola detailed her experiences with applying for promotion and not being noticed for the “great and positive impact” she contributed to the institution. She explained at length how she applied for promotion three times and was rejected three times until the president overturned the final rejection. She described the process as “tough” and shared that she was “tired of fighting.” She explained “they make you fight when you don’t’ want to fight. You think you’ve done everything that they’ve told you [to] do, and they still reject you.” She explained, “you can walk into an institution full of people, and feel alone.” She acknowledged that “you have to overlook a lot of things if you’re a Black woman, and you have to pick your battles…[and] you
just have to let things go because it’s a losing cause. [Though] you can never stop altogether.”

Peacola maintained that building relationships with “two other Black women” helped her get through the difficult times. She maintained:

had they not been here- and I mean this as no joke – I would have lost my mind. As a matter of fact, I did for a little while. I forgot where I came from, I lost my confidence, because everywhere I turned, people were questioning me, people were expecting me to do things that I had no clue, I was supposed to do, or they expected [me] to do them… I was sick when I went home every night. Emotionally drained

Peacola likened her experiences working at Progressive Community College to a “fight”. She contended that she had no desire “to socialize a lot with people here.” She explained “I don’t feel comfortable.”

**Structural description.** When asked about organizational culture Peacola discussed how institutional leaders cultivated a toxic culture. She spoke about her experiences with promotion and tenure and identified that the policies and procedures were unclear. She maintained that even when you do everything that they tell you “they still reject you.” Peacola expressed experiencing loneliness, invisibility, and fatigue. These experiences contributed to Peacola’s perception of the culture as “toxic.”

**Composite Description: The Essence of the Lived Experiences**

Organizational members come to learn and understand their role and place within an organization based on the implementation of policies, rules and procedures, interactions with other organizational members and leaders, and through the rituals, ceremonies, and stories specific to the organization. Theoretically, organizational culture is created by its leaders and its members. It occurs both collectively and individually. Black females collectively learned from
the practices and interactions with organizational members their role and place within the system. Individually, they identified there were “differing,” “unwritten,” and “subtle” rules that dictated their role in the system. Collectively, they processed and interpreted the understandings of their role in the system and determined that Black women working in the CSCU are at times “invisible” and go “unnoticed.” This collective learning and individual understanding might also be seen as a cycle out-skirting Black females from the system. This uncovering had negative effects on Black female’s lived experiences and perceptions of organizational culture. The essence of the experience is that the Connecticut State College and University system lacks diversity and the lack of diversity within the system creates a culture for Black female professionals that may be difficult to navigate and renders them “invisible” at times.

The third and final step in phenomenological research is the creation of “a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The unified statement is deduced by synthesizing the meaning units from all of the interviews. The first round of analysis yielded twenty-one main points: leadership, advocacy, invisibility, adapting, fatigue, relationships, diversity, mentoring, duality, belonging, appearance, involvement, socializing, opportunity, support, policies and procedures, recognition, communication, racism, environment, and rules. Table 6 shows the initial codes assigned during the first cycle analysis by participant.
After reviewing the initial codes from all the participants, the researcher amalgamated the codes via thematic coding. The amalgamated points created three cluster codes: 1) diversity, 2) relationship, and 3) leadership. Table 3 shows the cluster codes assigned during the second cycle of analysis.

Table 3
Second Cycle Cluster Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster Code</th>
<th>Initial Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Communication, Support, Recognition, Policies and Procedures, Leadership, Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Invisibility, Fatigue, Duality, Diversity, Appearance, Environment, Racism, Belonging,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Opportunity, Mentoring, Advocacy, Relationships, Adapting, Involvement, Socializing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subsequently, the researcher re-read the data emergent within each cluster codes, and found that three themes emerged from the data that encapsulated the participants’ experiences. The three themes were: Importance of relationships, Importance of leadership, and Lack of diversity. Only one theme, lack of diversity, emerged from all the participants. Importance of leadership and Importance of relationships surfaced from six of the seven. Table 7 shows how the themes manifested between the participants.

Table 7
Cluster and Thematic Codes by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Ida Mae</th>
<th>Florence</th>
<th>Sula</th>
<th>Nel</th>
<th>Hannah</th>
<th>Eva</th>
<th>Peacola</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Diversity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Relationships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Leadership</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although only one theme emerged from all the participants, six of the seven women
stressed *Importance of leadership* and discussed in depth the ways in which leadership set the
tone for an inclusive or exclusive culture. Eva was an anomaly. Though Eva discussed at great
length the effect ambiguous policies and procedures and unwritten rules had on her experiences,
she did not attribute the ambiguity to leadership direction, rather she approached the deficit from
an affirmative action, legalistic standpoint. One possible explanation for this exception is Eva’s
background working extensively in diversity and inclusion, and her prior experience serving as a
member of an institution’s leadership team.

Beyond *Importance of leadership*, *Importance of relationships* manifested as a significant
theme among six of the seven participants. The importance of building and fostering
relationships emerged from Ida Mae, Florence, Eva, Nel, Sula, and Peacola. Each of these
women stressed the importance of making connections to advance and be recognized. Ida Mae
pointed out that being liked or known is a precursor to advancement and recognition. Eva
corroborated Ida Mae’s sentiments, stating that she believed she had to put herself in a position
to be seen lest she’d be invisible. Similarly, Florence, Nel, and Peacola confirmed that they too
believed that cultivating relationships was essential to being informed and included. Though
each participant recognized the importance of relationships, ironically four of the participants
stressed that they did not feel welcome enough to cultivate the relationships needed to advance
and be a part of the community. One possible explanation for this commonality is that all of
these women worked at Progressive Community College and shared similar experiences securing
their places and being heard at that institution.

Nel was the exception. Nel explained that she felt comfortable networking and building
relationships at her institution. One possible explanation for this exception is Nel’s perceptions
and positive experience with leadership support. Nel’s position as a member of the leadership
team at her institution may have played a significant role in her perceptions about relationships.

*Lack of diversity* was raised by all the women. Each of them acknowledged that there were very few Black women and people of color in general at their respective institutions. However, Ida Mae, Sula, and Nel discussed in great length the physical absence of diverse faculty and staff at their respective institutions. Ida Mae stressed the impact the absence of Black women had on her experiences. She explained that she would be more prone to engage and interact if there were other Black women on staff who related to her. Nel discussed the obviousness of Black staff offices. Unlike Nel and Ida Mae, Sula addressed the lack of diversity and understanding from a human resources perspective and discussed the lack of diversity at the faculty, staff, student, and administrative levels. Florence, Peacola, Eva, and Hannah all highlighted lack of diversity as a factor in their work-life balance. The women acknowledged that the lack of diversity within the CSCU system at times created an uncomfortable and unwelcoming environment. No clear explanation manifested for this commonality between these participants. However, it is likely this commonality emerged as a result of the participants’ observations in their respective roles as leaders at their respective institutions.

The conclusion can be made based on the data contained herein that *lack of diversity* when referenced in this study directly refers to the numerical representation of Black females and people of color, and indirectly refers to the creation of knowledge and ideas. Likewise, *importance of leadership* refers to the ways in which the leadership at the institutions represented in this study engage with, support, strategically plan and communicate, and foster an atmosphere of inclusion amongst organizational members. Finally, *importance of relationships* when referenced in this study refers to the ways in which the participants of this study interact with organizational members, and come to understand their roles and the rules that govern. It should
be noted that these definitions are based on the narratives, as perceived by the participants working at the institutions represented in this study, and contained throughout this chapter.

Essentially, the participants collectively learned from the practices and interactions with organizational members their role and place within the system. Individually, they identified there were “differing,” “unwritten,” and “subtle” rules that dictated their role in the system. Collectively, they processed and interpreted the understandings of their role in the system and determined that Black women working in the CSCU are at times “invisible” and go “unnoticed.” This collective learning and individual understanding might also be seen as a cycle out-skirting Black females from the system. The essence of their experience is that the Connecticut State College and University system lacks diversity and the lack of diversity within the system creates a culture for Black female professionals that is difficult to navigate and renders them “invisible” at times.

Summary

This chapter examined the results of seven participant interviews, creating a textural and structural description for each. The results of the textural and structural descriptions were synthesized to create a composite description that revealed three major themes: (a) Lack of diversity, (b) Importance of leadership, and (c) Importance of relationships. Lack of diversity emerged as the major theme and essence of the cultural phenomenon under examination. These themes were defined based on the narratives shared by each participant as: (a) Lack of diversity, the numerical representation of people of color working at the institutions represented in the study, (b) Importance of leadership, the ways in which institutional leaders engage with, support, strategically plan and communication, and foster inclusivity, and (c) Importance of relationships, the ways in which the participants interact with organizational members, and come to understand
their roles and the rules that govern their behaviors. Chapter five will discuss these findings further.
Chapter 5: Interpretations, Recommendations, Conclusions

This research sought to understand black female professionals’ perceptions of their lived experiences with organizational culture within the CSCU system. One question guided the examination, what are Black female professionals’ perceptions of their experience with organizational culture in the CSCU system? Given that the focus of this transcendental-phenomenological study was to understand how Black women perceive and experience organizational culture in the CSCU system, after interviewing the seven participants, the researcher adopted a three cycle analysis approach. The first cycle of analysis: horizontalization, identified specific statements from the transcripts that revealed information about the participants’ experiences and clustered them into major themes. (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 9). The second cycle of analysis: thematic analysis and the creation of textural and structural descriptions, synthesized the major themes into a description of each participant. The third and final cycle of analysis: creation of a composite description, described the meanings and essence of the participants’ lived experiences and perceptions. The data revealed three major themes: (a) Lack of diversity, (b) Importance of leadership, and (c) Importance of relationships. Lack of diversity was the dominant theme and “essence” of all of the participants’ experiences.

This chapter will interpret and discuss these findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks, provide recommendations for future research, and implications for practice. The chapter concludes with reflections from the researcher.

Significance

The impetus for this study emerged as a result of research on graduation rates among students of color (Jones, 2006), interactions with faculty and staff of color, and the challenges faculty and staff of color face working in higher education. The National Center for Educational
Statistics (2011) found a discrepancy between the number of students of color enrolled at higher education institutions and the number of people of color employed at those institutions. This discrepancy has been attributed to unwelcoming and uninviting cultures (Glenn & Johnson, 2012), and a lack of Black faculty and staff working at institutions of higher education (King, 1993; Madkins, 2011; Patton, 2009; Tough, 2014).

As a result of these findings, this study sought to better understand the lived experiences of faculty and staff of color. In so doing, the researcher hoped to identify strengths and areas of improvement that may directly impact the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff of color and indirectly impact graduation rates among students of color. Although students, faculty, and staff of color collectively share similar experiences in higher education, Howard-Vital (1989) found that Black women in particular struggle to gain identity and place within the academy. As a result, the researcher chose to focus this examination on the lived experiences of Black female professionals working in higher education.

This study examined Black female professionals’ perceptions of organizational culture in the CSCU system. Three themes emerged from the stories shared by the participants: (a) Lack of diversity, (b) Importance of leadership, and (c) Importance of relationships. Lack of diversity was identified as the dominant theme, the “essence” of their shared experiences. The next section discusses these findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks and the scholarly literature.

**Overview of Organizational Culture Model and Black Feminist Thought**

The study employed a combination of Edgar Schein’s organizational culture model (OCM) and Patricia Hill Collins’ Black feminist thought (BFT) to highlight the participants’ experiences and perceptions of organizational culture in the CSCU system. While OCM served to identify the culture extant in the CSCU system, BFT was used to provide insight into the
perceptions and lived experiences of the participants:

Black Feminist Thought supports the interdependence of what are called “theories of the flesh” and “specialized knowledge.” Theories of the flesh reflect the distinctive interpretations of the world carved out of the material realities of a group’s life experiences. Specialized knowledge infuses elements and themes of black women’s culture and traditions with critical interventionist thinking to provide black women with new tools of resistance. (Madison, 1993)

Neither the social construct (Black feminist thought) nor the physical structures (organizational culture model) tell the complete story independently, therefore the CSCU “system cannot be fully explained by analyzing its individual components” (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009, p. 632). They must be analyzed collectively.

Combining OCM and BFT provided a means to explore the collective perceptions and lived experiences of Black female professionals in depth. Hill Collins (1990) maintained that the shared and collective ideas, experiences, and understandings of Black women must be considered at every level of discourse. No matter the theoretical lens with which organizational culture is examined, researchers must “settle for the notion that culture is a set of shared meanings that make it possible for members of a group to interpret and act upon” (Schein, 1984, p. 3). Therefore, full understanding of how Lack of diversity emerged as the dominant theme among the participants and their perceptions of the culture in the system requires a discussion of the findings in relation to the commonalities between all the participants, as defined by OCM and understood through the Black feminist thought lens. Therefore, OCM and BFT are discussed simultaneously. Figure 2.1 portrays the way OCM and BFT worked in tandem to explain the findings. The study neither attempted to create a new theoretical framework nor test the current
frameworks used. Rather the study sought to use OCM and BFT to examine and understand the participants’ perceptions and experiences.

In its most simplistic state, organizational culture refers to the directives under which members of an organization govern themselves. It is the standard by which behaviors, actions, deeds, and work processes manifest themselves within an organization (Martin & Siehl, 1983; Morgan, 2006; Schall, 2013). Organizational culture is the interaction and juxtaposition of abilities and skills, as perceived by organization members, that determine the culture (Festinger, 1954; Schall, 1983), be it positive or negative. Hill Collins (1990) asserted that Black women have intersecting oppressions, points where inequalities and inequities meet (Hill Collins, 2000), that produce commonalities in their experiences. The participants of this study described various times where they experienced varying levels of ambiguous rules, and overlooking that sometimes led to a lack of understanding and inequity. It is the cross point between the
ambiguous organizational espoused values and the basic assumptions of the participants that their perceptions of the rules for Black females working in the CSCU system differ from others working in the system. As a result, the identified themes: the importance of leadership, the importance of relationships, and a lack of diversity emerged as intersecting oppressions. Florence embodied this intersecting when she explained how her application for promotion was denied first by colleagues, and then by the institution’s president. Her recollection acknowledged that the initial review and denial was completed by a committee she did not have allies on, and with whom she perceived to lack racial diversity. She further explained when she sought feedback from the institution’s leadership she received no support and little guidance. This experience left Florence feeling “unvalued”.

Experiences like the one noted above contribute to the participants’ perceptions of the system’s culture and their lived experiences within the system. Subsequently, the research found that the participants perceived that the culture in the CSCU system lacked diversity and promoted unwelcoming environments for people of color. The participants highlighted challenges navigating the system, obtaining the social capital needed to advance, identifying safe spaces, and advocating for themselves.

Although the participants communicated confidence in their own professional and educational prowess, they also expressed feelings of exclusion resulting from a lack of racial and gender diversity in the system. The results of this study confirmed the findings of organizational culture theorists and Black feminists, who posit that people of color, specifically Black women, are a minoritized group. As a result of their minoritized status, they often experience intersecting and dual identities, barriers, resistance, exclusion, oppressions, and challenges securing their places within the CSCU system’s organizational structures (Madison, 1993; Pastrana, 2010;
Discussion of Findings in Relation to Theoretical Frameworks

Organizational culture is understood as “the cultivation of human beings” (Hatch, 2013, p. 158) whereby organization members -- for the purposes of this study, the Black female participants -- learn their roles and expected behaviors. OCM posits that culture is powerful and “operates outside of our awareness” (Schein, 2012, p. 7) and within ourselves (Schein, 2012) simultaneously. How an organization member perceives the culture within an organization is determined not only by her experiences within the organization, but by her ontological underpinnings as well ( Carlton Parsons, 2008). BFT maintains that Black women’s perceptions adjoin the intersection of racism and sexism. Although, the findings in this research did not highlight sexism as an area of concern, the participants’ perceptions of the culture within the CSCU system confirmed that Black female professionals working in the field of higher education perceived, amongst other things, a lack of diversity in relation to black females working within the system, which ultimately led them to experiencing ambiguous cultural norms and marginalization (Jones, 2006).

The participants’ perspectives of organizational culture highlighted the ways in which each participant identified her place individually as a Black woman, and collectively as Black women, within the system (Hill Collins, 1986). The participants identified the importance of leadership, the importance of relationships, and lack of diversity as nuances that created an organizational culture exclusive of Black female professionals. At the core of OCM is the idea that an organization’s culture tells its “members who they are, how to behave toward each other, and how to feel good about themselves” (Schein, 2012, p. 29). The narratives provided by Nel, Peacola, and Florence surrounding their applications for promotion provided examples of how
systematic policies and procedures communicated to these participants their value and roles at
their respective institutions. Each of these women applied for promotion and were denied at least
once. Both Peacola and Florence admitted that they were denied twice. The reasons behind the
denials ranged from not enough time invested to the committee felt the application was lacking.
The challenge with these justifications as explained by the participants is that the perception and
ultimately the outcome of promotion denial suggested to the participants that they did not
belong. Peacola surmised it by saying, “You think you’ve done everything that they’ve told you
to do, and they still reject you.” Herein lies the importance of applying dual frameworks to the
examination of these findings. In order to understand the lived experience of Black women in the
CSCU system, assessing the system’s culture is not only vital but required (Schein, 2012). Each
of the participants shared stories like the one highlighted above that explicated their experiences
navigating the lack of diversity within the contexts of policies, people, and practices, thereby
confirming the applicability of OCM and BFT to the findings. Eva’s perceptions and narrative on
the system’s “underground pipe system” and “in circles” that restrict the sharing of information
to those, not a part of the circles, particularly Black women, confirmed and supported the use of
both OCM and BFT for analysis. Furthermore, the mere fact that Ida Mae, Nel, Hannah, Peacola,
and Eva, as disclosed in chapter four, perceived there to be differing and unwritten rules for
Black women than there are for others corroborated the applicability of OCM and BFT to the
findings.

The participant responses identified the entry points of exclusion that touched on all three
levels of Schein’s OCM: artifacts, espoused values and beliefs, and basic assumptions, as well as
these aspects of Hill Collins’ BFT: heterogeneous collectivity and intersecting oppressions.

The Essence of the Lived Experience: Lack of Diversity
Diversity, when referenced in organizational culture literature most often refers to the numerical representation of organizational members disaggregated by gender, race and ethnicity, and full or part-time status (Literte, 2011; Sleeter, 2011). Based on this definition coupled with the findings of this study, the numerical representation of Black female professionals working in the CSCU system is lacking. Additional definitions of diversity speak to the cognitive differences generated by cultural differences and manifested in idea sharing. The research found that though the participants believed their respective institutions adopted a culture of understanding and diversity on paper, they systematically fell short in their implementation of diversity in practice. The findings revealed that strategies for managing and implementing diversity policies and procedures are not only a “systemic problem” in higher education (Jones, 2006, p. 148), but a CSCU problem as well. The identification of a breakdown between the institutional policies and strategic plans that encompass diversity in theory, and the application of procedures, actions, and behaviors inclusive of diversity in practice, directly speaks to levels two (espoused values and beliefs) and three (basic assumptions) of Schein’s organizational culture model. The identification of Dominant Theme 1, Lack of diversity, not only provided insight into the experiences of Black female participants, it also confirmed many of the findings in the organizational culture and diversity literature. This theme revealed that diversity in relation to racial and gender minoritized people, ideas, and identity is imperative to organizational success and to organization members’ sense of belonging (Jones, 2006). Subsequently, lack of diversity arose as the dominant theme and provided insight into the participants’ perceptions of culture and their lived experiences working in the CSCU system.

The female participants collectively agreed that their institutions lacked a racially and gender diverse workforce. In fact, during the interviews with Nel, Sula, and Ida Mae, each
woman attempted to count on her hands the number of Black female non-clerical professionals working at their respective institutions. Ida Mae became openly frustrated when she discussed the lack of diversity on her campus and the impact it had on her lived experiences. She stated:

I mean it’s there, but it is... It could be better. Actually, it’s not there, I take that back… I get very frustrated… The lack of people of color in professional level positions and faculty level positions. A lot of our women of color are in clerical level positions. So, from my perspective just walking through campus and interacting with other departments and stuff like that at times it can be frustrating because... there’s almost... there’s almost a lacking of... I feel like if there are more Black women on campus, I would have more friends on campus.

Similarly, Florence verbalized frustration with the use of the word diversity and lack of understanding as it related to diverse populations. Florence discussed the ways in which language created an uncomfortable and marginalizing atmosphere. She explained:

[The] dean... refer[ed] to [a] professor… as the diversity on his search committee… That was ridiculous… That’s the attitude of a lot of people, or the level of understanding of a lot of people, and when we did our, um, formal diversity survey… we got commented that we didn’t really need diversity training, or one thing that stood out was that diversity wasn’t needed in the sciences... Was just like, oh my gosh, you know, I mean, just total rejection of the whole concept, um, not even willing to reflect, you know, personally…

As we get more diverse faculty and staff that will change, but the whole climate of our culture and country is more of a pushback right now, and um, we can’t be pushback, we have to kind of push forward… I think this observation could be made by a lot of faculty, students segregate in the classroom, I mean, there’s the little White section, the Black
section, the Hispanic section, and I mean, if our content or our teaching doesn’t um, address multicultural or intercultural beings, then we’re never going to see any mixing in there. I mean, even they’re not taking advantage of, we’re able to take advantage of the diversity if we don’t give them the means to, so I think that’s why training is needed, um, so we can incorporate the personal experience, history, content, language, whatever it is, to raise the level of instruction and to raise the level of involvement to not make people feel marginalized.

Florence’s account highlighted the challenges she faced trying to implement and advocate for diversity training and intercultural educational pedagogy. The pushback Florence received contributed to her experience and perception of marginalization.

The lack of diversity in the system directly affected the ways in which the participants saw themselves fitting within the system. Invisibility, fatigue, and adaptability were phrases used by the participants. Collins (1983) maintained that as a result of race and gender, Black women share experiences that produce commonalities and themes. The perceived experience of a lack of diversity within the CSCU system produced commonalities and intersecting oppressions, manifest in an identity that was described as invisible (Hill Collins, 1986).

Black women, even in professional or student capacities, often experience invisibility (Patton, 2009). Even when a Black woman abides by or cautiously maneuvers within the parameters set by the majority group, she is at the very least targeted, insulted, invalidated, and oppressed (Lewis & Neville, 2015); at the worst, she is overlooked and invisible. Hannah spoke in detail about how she felt her ideas and perspectives as they related to her office space were
overlooked. The story Hannah shared illuminated the lack of understanding as it related to the functions of her job:

The office that they placed me in... was really not an appropriate office for counseling students… because what’s needed for a therapeutic environment is that you have to have space that’s not only just welcoming, that has good air quality… and that protects student confidentiality. They had me in an office with vertical blinds that you could see in between the cracks… it was a center office, it wasn’t an office on the outskirts that had windows, it was in the center of the… department… I said, you know, I shouldn’t even be in this space. This is wrong… The response that I got was… well, this is all the space that we have… It was the most foolishness that I’ve ever heard from professionals as to why they can’t support me ethically in my decisions… I never got any consideration for my level of professionalism in helping me to create an environment that would meet ethical standards... I was constantly ignored… and that made me angry.

Hannah’s recollection captured the ways in which organizational artifacts influenced her lived experiences as Black woman professional. The physical space in which Hannah was assigned to work caused her to feel oppressed, ignored, and invisible.

Eva explained that as a Black female faculty member she often felt invisible and her contributions disregarded. A possible explanation of Eva’s perceptions of invisibility may be her adjunct status. Similarly, Peacola, who is also a Black female faculty member, expressed feeling fatigued from fighting. Peacola shared that as a Black female faculty member she constantly had to educate White faculty members on African American culture and literature. Peacola explained
that as a result of always serving as the educator for educators she became fatigued. Eva and
Peacola’s experiences and perceptions, though valid in their own right, were similar, perhaps
because both were female faculty in the same department at the same institution; Progressive
Community College.

These findings confirmed research conducted by Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, and Roman
(2016), which found that Black women struggled with belonging, expectations, and coping with
the duality of race and gender in higher education. Their research found that the duality of race
and gender caused the participants to perceive and experience exclusive, cold, and isolated
environments (Myers, 2012). The intersectionality of race and gender collectively contributed to
participants’ experience and perceptions of invisibility, fighting and fatigue, adaptability, and
advocacy: Double jeopardy became additive (Lewis & Neville, 2015).

If diversity in faculty and staff begets diversity in ideas, faculty engagement, and
knowledge creation (Alvin & Edna Breinig, 2007), and the participants of this research
highlighted a lack of diversity within in the system, it can be presumed that innovation is
systematically stunted. Florence highlighted the importance of diversity as it relates to the
creation of new ideas and innovation. She observed that, “there wasn’t any influx of new ideas”
at Progressive Community College. Alvin and Edna Breinig (2007) proclaimed that “diversity is
not a choice: it is a practical imperative” that must be addressed by “higher education leadership”
(p. 4).

Summary. The perceived experience of a lack of diversity contributed to the participants
identifying artifacts as a challenge area within the CSCU system. The emergence of artifacts as
an area of improvement suggested that the small percentage of Black female non-clerical professionals working in the system created an atmosphere that caused the participants to feel excluded. Observing the lack of diversity sometimes caused the participants to feel marginalized and to seek spaces with other Black women and men where it would be safe to converse and commune.

The participants acknowledged that the physical presence of Black women on their respective campuses was scarce, thereby confirming that little progress has been made to increase the hiring of racial and gender minorities into faculty and administrative positions (Rai and Critzer, 2000). The challenge illuminated by the lack of diversity within the system is that “the presence of the occasional token woman or person of color in managerial positions often reaffirmed the white male norm...” (Mumby, 2013, p.232) and reiterated that Black women are “the most marginalized and disadvantaged social group” (Jones, 2006, p. 148) in most organizations. The lack of diversity in the system contributed to the participants’ perspectives of their roles and place at their institutions and how those roles impacted relationships with others on campus. Kohli (2012) maintained that people of color often see commonalities in oppressions between themselves and others. The participants confirmed this presumption and identified the lack of diversity as the dominant essence of their experiences and their perceptions of organizational culture in the system.

As a result of the lack of racial and gender diversity in the system, the participants acknowledged that building and maintaining positive relationships was difficult yet vital to their advancement. This revelation confirmed research conducted by Bova (2000), which found that professional Black women struggled to foster relationships and secure mentors within their organization. Bova (2000) attributed this difficulty to the racial majority-minority group
Theme 2: Importance of Relationships

This theme provided further insight into the participants’ perceptions of the culture within the CSCU system, their roles as organization members, and their place within the organization. Schein (2012) posited that group dynamics, organizational rules and norms, organizational member roles, identity creation (Festinger, 1954), and expectations are defined by the majority group or dominant group (Guerin, 1995). Subsequently, based on the emergence of Dominant Theme 1, Lack of diversity, the researcher concluded that the participants were not a part of the majority group and therefore presumed, based on the findings of the study, that the norms, expectations, and dictates of relationship building were stipulated by the majority or dominant group. In this way, the dominant group, White faculty, staff, and administrators, created an environment that, as Peacola said, “pitted” members against one another rather than fostering a community of inclusivity. Thus, the study found that the participants felt cultivating and maintaining relationships with those individuals in the dominant group was essential yet hard to do.

The emergence of Importance of relationships as a theme not only corroborated what is currently noted in the general body of literature about the Black woman’s experience in higher education (Julia, 2004; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008), but it also showed the participants’ basic assumptions about Black women’s roles in the CSCU system, and the rules they must follow in order to advance. The idea that social interactions and social influence contributed to the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants directly speaks to level three, basic assumptions, of Schein’s OCM. Eva surmised:

You have to really kind of build relationships to even get that opportunity... and in my
definition of building relationships, I call it being visible. Attending their events, attending committee meetings, um, showing up for health fairs, showing up for psychology fairs, being visible and observing, and then also asking when opportunities are available, “Think of me! Think of me, I’m available!” So, those are the relationships that have to be built in the absence of anyone being there to mentor you.

Although mentoring and fostering relationships is a common determinate for upward mobility irrespective of race or gender, many of the participants communicated strong convictions and beliefs that relational ties were not only vital in order to access the CSCU system, but difficult to cultivate. Ida Mae, Florence, Eva, Peacola, and Nel all relayed that advancement and opportunity were contingent upon likeability and popularity.

Eva’s account identified a separation between herself and “them” and highlighted the difference between invisibility and visibility. Although no clarification was given with regard to the delineation, Eva’s reflection suggests that as a black female adjunct within the CSCU system she not only has to be visible by showing up to “their events”, but she also has to advocate and build relationships without a mentor to guide her. The separation between “her” and “them”, the juxtaposition between her visibility and her invisibility, and the acknowledgment that mentors do not exist for her points to intersecting oppressions whereby the emphasis on building relationships for black females in this system may be difficult. The results revealed that regardless of race and gender, building relationships and networking were paramount to access and advancement in the system (Blackwell, 1989; Patton, 2009), however, black women have difficulty doing both.

The notion that Black women have to be visible and, as Hannah noted, “code shift,” in order to advance provided insight into the importance of building relationships for the Black
woman. Code shifting is a term used by Black people to describe the creation of different and separate personas when dealing with White people (Guiffrida, 2003). Ida Mae, Florence, Nel, and Sula discussed the importance of building relationships through self-advocacy, stepping up when opportunities arise, and being seen. Hannah was an anomaly. She strongly described ways in which she advocated for herself and students. Hannah attested that she made a conscious decision each day to speak for the students, especially the Black students who weren’t being retained at her institution. Both self and student advocacy emerged multiple times among these participants. One possible explanation for this commonality is that each woman expressed the importance of volunteering and taking initiative for projects and committee involvement to not only contribute to her institution but to show college leadership and supervisors her worth.

Hannah and Eva discussed adaptability, the importance of being a chameleon and code shifting between their personal selves and their professional selves. Hannah talked about the duality of self. She explained that she has to wear two faces -- one for the office and one for family, friends, and social organizations. Eva concurred and explained that in order to succeed and advance in academe, it is imperative that Black women know how to navigate and adapt in any environment. A possible justification for the commonality between Hannah and Eva’s depiction of adaptability may be their knowledge, understanding, and work with civic and social justice organizations. Both women shared a deep understanding of the plight African Americans experienced in the United States and its implications for higher education and at their institutions. The lack of diversity and presence of Black women within the system impacted the ways in which the participants developed relationships.

**Summary**

The emergence of the *importance of relationships* as a theme contributing to the lived
experiences of black female professionals in the CSCU system directly relates to the participant’s basic assumptions about how relationships are fostered and created. The stories shared by the participants highlighted the difficulty they faced interacting with organizational members and leaders. The inference can be made from the participants’ stories and observations that establishing relationships, although vital, require extra effort for black women.

**Theme 3: Importance of Leadership**

The third theme provided insight into organizational culture as it related to the participants’ perceptions of the ways in which institutional leaders provided direction, maintained accountability, and provided support. Leadership accountability, direction, and support are espoused values and beliefs that are directly connected to the mission and vision of an organization, through which organization members come to understand their roles and place with the organization (Church, Siegal, Waclawski, & Burke, 1996). Six of the seven participants identified the *Importance of leadership* as a significant factor affecting their perspectives of organizational culture and their lived experience. *Importance of leadership* in relation to institutional direction, accountability, and support was stressed by six of the women, as noted in Table 2. This is significant because the perceptions organization members have of their work environment and leaders affect their lived experiences within the organization (Nealey & Fiedler, 1968). For example, if organization members don’t comprehend the objective or espoused values and beliefs, or feel a part of the process, the organization runs the risk of failing (Bush, 2011; Easterly, 2009). So, whether the climate is affected negatively or positively depends on whether or not members feel part of the organization (Kezar, 2012; Smidts, Pruyn, & Van Riel, 2001) and trust the administration’s espoused values (Bush, 2011; Vogelgesang, Hannes, & Avolio, 2013). Collectively, the participants identified challenges with trusting leadership direction and
accountability. Ida Mae commented about ambiguity in the leadership’s espoused values of direction and accountability, noting:

I don’t think we have one blended culture… and by blended I mean everyone is doing the same thing… targeting one culture or one goal… Right now… some departments are very torn and there’s a lot of crap and in other departments [they] work really, really well together.

Bush (2011) argued, “trust is key to collaboration, commitment, collective vision, and sense of belonging” (p. 259). Florence confirmed that there were challenges with leadership values and accountability. She recounted the “level of ridiculousness that mars the institution” in the story about an administrator who lost her professional personnel file. Her story illuminated frustration with leadership accountability and commitment and caused Florence to question her own commitment to the organization as a consequence. She admitted, “I can’t really commit to someone who won’t, doesn’t see the value in what I’m doing.” The assumptions made by Florence and Ida Mae, as a result of the actions taken by their leaders, provided insight into the importance of leadership in fostering connectedness and a sense of place for the participants.

Although leadership direction and accountability surfaced as a challenge for some of the participants, they also highlighted instances where leadership support provided opportunities for growth and development. Nel and Sula both said that they felt supported by their institution’s president and as a result perceived the overall culture at their respective institutions as inclusive. Based on these findings, the researcher surmised that leadership support, accountability, and direction played a major role in the participants’ perceptions of a welcoming and supportive environment even though the culture at their respective institutions lacked diversity.
Summary

The inference can then be made that leadership direction, accountability, and support are important espoused values, as perceived by six of the participants. Likewise, the participants provided insight into the espoused values and beliefs embedded in the CSCU system that revealed how the leadership at the respective institutions set the tone for the participants’ perceptions of exclusivity or inclusivity within the system. These findings confirmed that Black women often experience marginalization, chilly organizational climates, and differentiated hiring and promotion standards.

Implications for Practice

The perceptions and experiences of the Black female participants revealed that as a result of the lack of diversity, Black women have challenges building relationships, and look to leadership for support, accountability, and direction. Because of these findings, it is incumbent upon the CSCU leadership, black female professionals, and all organizational members to address the lack of diversity in the system. To begin to address the lack of diversity and assist with the challenges the participants identified, CSCU leadership should consider: (a) recruitment, hiring, and retention practices for black women and minority faculty and staff, (b) implementing mentorship programs, activities, and opportunities that engage minority faculty and staff, (c) implement recognition ceremonies or opportunities that highlight faculty and staff contributions and achievements. In addition, black female professionals should also consider developing communities of practices and carving out space for themselves.

Developing mentorship programs, staff diversification and diversity training, and safe spaces or communities of practice that support racial and gender minorities is paramount if the system intends to have a diversified workforce and increased student persistence.
Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

The participants discussed at length the lack of diversity evident in the CSCU system and identified the need for a more diversified workforce. Research conducted by Caroline Sotello, Myers, and Creswell (1999) on minority faculty recruitment, hiring, and retention found that higher education institutions in the Midwest needed to diversify staff. Likewise, this research confirmed that higher education institutions in the CSCU system need to diversify their faculty and staff. One way to address the need to diversify is through cluster hiring. Cluster hiring is a process through which institutions hire multiple people of color. Many institutions of higher education have adopted cluster hiring as a model to attract qualified and cross-trained minority faculty and staff and to increase minority faculty and staff presence (Patton, 2015). Cluster hiring focuses on hiring a group of people at one time who have varying degree and skill levels and are versed in multiple areas (Guenter-Schlesiner, Ojikutu, 2009). Cluster hiring requires institutions to strategically plan and hire based on the programmatic outcomes desired by divisions and departments. While cluster hiring is rooted in strategic planning, its purpose is to hire cohorts of minority faculty and staff at one time in order to minimize feelings of isolation and overload (Guenter-Schlesiner, Ojikutu, 2009). In this way, the group enters the institution as a team, acclimates and learns the culture of the institution as a team, and immerses within the institution.

While cluster hiring is a way to increase faculty and staff diversity, faculty and staff exchange programs is another means to recruit and retain minority faculty and staff within the CSCU system. Faculty and staff exchange programs provide opportunities for them to work at neighboring institutions. They require institutions to establish agreements with other institutions (Ault & Martell, 2007), similar to transfer and course articulation agreements. Faculty and staff exchange programs are a viable way to diversify, recruit, and retain minority faculty and staff as
they allow for interpersonal interaction, scholarly discourse, and personal and professional development. Faculty and staff exchange programs also provide an opportunity for minority faculty and staff to obtain guidance and mentorship.

**Mentoring Programs**

Faculty and staff mentoring is not a new concept. It is commonly defined as “a process through which a senior, experienced faculty member (mentor) provides guidance and support for a junior or less experienced colleague” (Beech, Calles-Escandon, Hairston, Langdon, Latham-Sadler, & Bell, 2013, p. 541). Many institutions and businesses have adopted and implemented mentoring programs as a way to boost staff morale and retention. Researchers found that although faculty and staff mentoring is essential to minority faculty and staff retention (Schrubbe, 2004), minorities are less likely to receive mentorships than non-minorities. The results from this research on Black women working in the CSCU system confirmed these findings and reiterated that minorities, Black women specifically, desire and need mentoring. Therefore, implementing a program geared at minority mentoring is recommended.

**Minority Fellowship Program**

Prior to the coalescence of the community colleges and the state universities into one system, the community colleges’ branch of the CSCU system, formerly known as the Connecticut Community College System, had a Minority Fellowship Program. The purpose of the Minority Fellowship Program was to provide support and recruitment efforts for minorities.

The goals of the program were to provide the 12 community colleges and the chancellor’s office with opportunities to:

- further diversify the professional workforce of the community colleges,
- create and facilitate diversified career paths for minorities within and outside of the
community college system,

- promote the community colleges as desirable environments within which members of minority groups can establish and maintain careers, and
- provide diverse role models for the benefit of all Community College students (Armstrong, 1997).

The program was administered by the system’s officer for diversity. The program aimed to “enhance the ethnic, racial, and intellectual diversity that colleges seek to promote” (Armstrong, 2009) by providing minorities with the opportunity to receive training, mentoring, and experience working in the Connecticut Community Colleges:

The Minority Fellowship Program [was] an initiative jointly sponsored by the Board of Trustees of Community-Technical Colleges and a coalition of professional staff unions; the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges, the Federation of Technical College Teachers, (AFT) the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. A goal of the program [was] to provide the twelve Community Colleges and the System Office with opportunities to further diversify the professional workforce (Armstrong, 2009).

The requirements for acceptance into the program were that a candidate: (a) had to be a minority enrolled in at minimum their second year of graduate school; (b) had to commit to spending at minimum 6 hours per week on faculty or administrative related tasks under the direction of a mentor; (c) had to attend faculty or staff meetings, Minority Fellowship Orientation, and additional meetings as assigned; and (d) be willing to receive increased responsibilities throughout the year (Armstrong, 2009). The selected minority fellows were compensated monetarily for their participation and enrollment in the program.
Reinstatement of the Minority Fellowship Program is a plausible way for the CSCU system to address the concerns identified in this study. Though the researcher was unable to obtain information that provided details about the dissolution of the program, it may be worthwhile for CSCU leadership to reevaluate the program, make the necessary adjustments, and re-implement it throughout the system.

It is likely that the reimplementation of the Minority Fellowship Program would increase faculty and staff diversity; provide opportunities for mentoring, leadership development, and diversity training; and create safe spaces where minority groups could establish communities of practice. However, simply re-implementing the Minority Fellowship Program is not enough. CSCU leadership, institution presidents, and administrators must also consider: (a) evaluating and changing how faculty and staff of color recruitment and hiring occurs, (b) assessing faculty and staff of color retention rates, (c) establishing activities and events that promote engagement between faculty and staff of color, and (d) recognizing their accomplishments and contributions to the system and individual institutions.

**Black Female Professionals and Organizational Members**

While it is recommended that the CSCU leadership and institutional administrative teams address the lack of diversity emergent within the system, it is imperative that black women working in the system purposefully and strategically work to establish and build communities of practice irrespective of leadership involvement. Hill Collins’ (2012) maintains that the black women must initiate change and create new knowledge. Therefore, it is imperative that black female professionals’ working in the CSCU system carve out space and create opportunities to connect with other black women in the system. One way to carve out space and opportunities is to create a monthly community of practice that encourages and promotes socialization and
system-wide sisterhood and fellowship. By creating these spaces for socialization and connection black female professionals working in the CSCU system may be able to provide advice and guidance to other black women entering the system. In this way, the black women professionals who have experience working in the system can serve as mentors to the neophytes.

Additionally, organizational members irrespective of race or gender must commit to engaging in the difficult yet needed conversations that not only address bias, institutional policies and procedures, and member interactions but also lead to action plans that incite inclusivity and change. Essentially, it is incumbent upon organizational members and system and institutional leaders to address the lack of diversity within the CSCU system.

Summary

The recommendations made herein are practical and viable solutions. Institutions of higher education across the country have implemented mentorship programs, faculty and staff of color exchange programs, and hiring practices that solicit and attract qualified faculty and staff of color. The initiatives referenced above are a few examples of what organizational members, institutions, and systems are doing to ensure that their faculty and staff of color feel included. The recommendations contained herein are not exhaustive but serve as a starting point for CSCU leaders, organizational members, and institutional presidents to not only begin a discussion about the experiences and perceptions faculty and staff of color have about the system but also to move towards implementing changes.

Recommendations for Future Research

This phenomenological study, with seven participants, was one way to examine and understand the lived experiences of Black women working in higher education. To understand how organizational culture contributes to the lived experiences and perceptions of minoritized
people working in the CSCU system, this research focused solely on the Black female. A future study may choose to focus on racial minorities irrespective of gender to more fully assess the culture of the system. Likewise, a future study may choose to focus solely on gender minorities. The researcher believes that if one seeks to understand the organizational culture emergent in higher education, examining the lived experiences and perceptions of minorities is essential. In addition, capturing the experiences of Black women beyond the community college is also vital.

Having completed the research, the variables contributing to this belief emerged as a result of the duality and dueling opinions and perceptions the participants raised in relation to leadership, opportunities, and advancement. Continuing research on the lived experiences of minorities in the CSCU system may provide valuable information needed to increase diversity among the faculty and staff pool.

For the future, additional qualitative research options are recommended. During the data analysis phase, the researcher uncovered a commonality among participants working at Progressive Community College. The commonality emergent between these participants revealed that they were more likely than the other participants to perceive the culture within the system as toxic towards minorities. As a result of this uncovering, investigating the culture and perceptions of minorities working at that college via a case study or other qualitative method may produce valuable information for its leadership.

The researcher chose to complete a qualitative study because she wanted to capture the voices of the participants. Though a quantitative method could be used to conduct research on the experiences of minorities working in the CSCU system, the researcher recommends further qualitative research as it will give voice to a population that, according to the findings of this study, is in the minority and on the outskirts.
Researcher Reflections

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) asserted, “by placing African-American women’s ideas in the center of analysis, I not only privilege those ideas but encourage… all others to investigate the similarities and differences among their own standpoints and those of African-American women” (p. xiii). As a Black woman working in the CSCU system during the time in which the study was completed, the researcher often found herself having to journal to bracket out her opinions and feelings throughout the process. As the only Black woman at the researcher’s institution holding a director’s level position, the researcher identified with many of the stories shared by the participants. She often felt isolated, passed over for opportunities, and misrecognized. Examining the lived experiences of Black female professionals working in the CSCU system not only resonated for the researcher, but it confirmed and affirmed for the researcher that her experiences and perceptions were valid individually and shared collectively.

Likewise, delving into the literature on organizational culture, Black women’s experiences in higher education and the workforce, and diversity in academe provided the researcher with a more in-depth understanding of the significance leadership, strategic planning, social norms, and group dynamics have on both organizational life and organization member’s lives. As an aspiring leader in academia, the researcher believes this study provided an alternative lens through which she must look when making decisions and implementing policies, procedures, and protocols. Although this study focused on the Black female professional, the researcher believes continued research is needed on other racial and gender minorities. She, therefore, is considering a cross-cultural study on the lived experiences of minorities working in the CSCU system. To say this study has awakened a passion and zest for examining and illuminating the experiences of racial minorities in the CSCU system is an understatement. The
researcher has learned through this study that additional research is needed on the system. It is the researcher’s hope that this study will encourage others to challenge the systemic norms and seek to understand what life is like for minorities within the CSCU system. In so doing, the researcher hopes the findings of the study will be examined and considered by the CSCU leadership and the recommendations from this study be explored and implemented throughout the system.

**Chapter Summary**

The research suggested that the CSCU system maintained, sustained, and established a hegemonic culture that lacked diversity. As result of ambiguous norms and chilly cultures, the participants experienced mis- or no recognition (Ford, 2011; Evans & Chun, 2007). The research also confirmed that Black women were not only underrepresented, but also more likely to be penalized via non-tenure, a more strenuous teaching and administrative workload, and lower academic rank because of group dynamics and social, historical, and cultural norms. The results of this study corroborated and affirmed that Black female professionals often navigate and negotiate their relationships and interactions with leadership within the CSCU system.

The results of this study found that Black female professionals working in the CSCU system perceived the system as lacking faculty and staff diversity. All but one of the participants expressed experiencing exclusive institutional norms and practices that led to perceptions of marginalization and chilly organizational culture. However, overall the results of this study affirmed much of the scholarly literature on Black women in higher education. The findings of this study revealed and provided evidence of a cyclic effect that creates a disparity between the number of Black faculty and staff, and Black students in higher education, whereby Black faculty, staff, and students all remain on the outskirts (Lang, 1992) of academe.
There appears to be a metaphorical revolving door through which Black women are kept from securing non-clerical, tenure, and professorate level positions. The revolving door metaphorically emphasizes the notion that Black women are still “knocking at freedom’s door” (Allen, et al., 2000a, p. 3) seeking liberation from the outskirts of higher education and acceptance into its segregated halls. As a result of the lack of diversity and metaphorical revolving door, the participants experienced invisibility and ambiguous cultural norms. They had to advocate for themselves in order to be visible and advance within the system. The idea that the Black women participants who applied for promotion and tenure had to apply multiple times and advocate for themselves to receive the recognition they worked for and earned reiterates that there is a cycle of marginalization and double standards which no other minority or non-minority group has had to transcend (Allen et al., 2000b; Blackwell, 1989).

The results of this research reinforces the idea that the number of Black women allowed access into higher education is controlled by those who have the power to construct policies and criteria (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson & Cantwell, 2011). Moreover, educational rights are produced, affirmed, and negated not only through legislative and legal channels but also through an evolving spectrum of educational activities embedded in everyday life (Espinoza & Shirin, 2014, p. 285). Unless college leaders begin to hire more minority faculty and staff (Allen et al, 2000b), diversity in higher education will remain inequitable, minority students will continue to lag behind in higher education attainment, and minority faculty and staff will continue to be missing on college campuses. Therefore, in order to increase the persistence rate of students of color on college campuses, college leadership must pay attention to the experiences of its minority faculty and staff, restructure hiring practices, and begin to end the cycle of outskirts created by exclusionary organizational cultures that reinforce a lack of diversity among the
faculty and staff.

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Appendix A: Call for Participation

*Research Study on Women in Higher Education and Organizational Culture Seeks Volunteer Participants*

- Are you currently employed at one of the State of Connecticut Public Colleges or Universities?
- Are you an African American/Black woman?

You may qualify to participate in a research study on the lived experiences of black women employees being conducted as part of a doctoral research project.

**What:** Research study on black women's experiences in higher education.

**Where:** Connecticut

**When:** Spring semester 2016

**Why:** The study will examine the influence organizational culture has on the lived experiences of black women working at public colleges and universities in Connecticut.

**How:** One-to-one, confidential interviews will be conducted in person and over the phone.

**Interested** - please contact Kelly K. Hope, MS at hope.k@husky.neu.edu. Participation is entirely voluntary and confidential. Selection to participate in this study is not guaranteed.
Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Dear (insert participant’s name): You are invited to take part in a research study that seeks to understand the lived experiences of Black Women in higher education. The researcher is inviting Black Women from Public Colleges and Universities within the Connecticut State University system to participate in the study. Attached to this e-mail you will find a copy of the Informed Consent Form. Please take a moment and read the form as it outlines the timeline, your rights as a participant in this research, and expectations from the researcher. If you are willing to proceed with the next step in this process, please sign the consent form and email it back to me. An original signature will be required and completed during your first in-person interview.
Appendix C: Introductory/Screening Questionnaire

Thank you for volunteering to take this short online introductory questionnaire. The answers from this questionnaire will be used to select participants for further research on the lived experiences of black women working in the Connecticut Public State University and College System. Your selection to participate in this study is not guaranteed. Please note you can discontinue participation at any time, your answers will remain confidential and if you are not chosen to participate your responses will be discarded. If chosen to participate you will receive an e-mailed invitation to participate within two weeks.

Screening Questions

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| Capital Community College, *Hartford*  
| Central Connecticut State University, *New Britain*  
| Charter Oak State College, *Online*  
| Eastern Connecticut State University, *Willimantic*  
| Gateway Community College, *New Haven*  
| Housatonic Community College, *Bridgeport*  
| Manchester Community College, *Manchester*  
| Middlesex Community College, *Middletown*  
| Naugatuck Valley Community College, *Waterbury*  
| Northwestern CT Community College, *Winsted*  
| Norwalk Community College, *Norwalk*  
| Quinebaug Valley Community College, *Danielson*  
| Southern Connecticut State University, *New Haven*  
| Three Rivers Community College, *Norwich*  
| Tunxis Community College, *Farmington*  
| Western Connecticut State University, *Danbury* |

| What’s your current job title? |  |

| Years of service at your institution | less than 1 year  
| 1-5 years  
| 5-10 years  
| over 10 years |

| Have you worked at other public institutions in the State of CT? |  |

| Are you able and willing to commit 2-3 hours over 1 month to this research project? | Yes |
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study that seeks to understand the lived experiences of Black Women Student Affairs Professionals in higher education. The researcher is inviting Black Women from Public Colleges and Universities within the Connecticut State University system to participate in the study. This form is a part of a process called “informed consent”. This informed consent is designed to inform you of the study before deciding to participate.

This study is being conducted by Kelly K. Hope, who is a doctoral student at Northeastern University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of Black Women working in the Connecticut higher education system and the ways in which institutional culture influences their lived experiences.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Complete a 5-minute introductory survey,
2. Reply to an invitation to participate with informed consent form attached,
3. Complete a 5-minute confirmation call,
4. Complete a 90-minute in-depth interview,
5. Maintain a written journal of experiences over the course of the week immediately following the in person interview and the follow-up e-mail verifying the interview transcript.
6. E-mail correspondences (as needed)
7. Complete a follow-up 30-minute interview to review the data and confirm interpretation and validity of findings

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. As such, you may recuse from completing the study at any time.

Risk to Participants:

The researcher does not believe this study poses any risks to the participant.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will remain confidential to the researcher and the researcher’s advisor. The Researcher will not use your personal information for any reasons outside of this research. Additionally, none of your identifiable information will be used in the study. All identifiable information including personal name and institution name will be replaced with an alias. Electronic copies of the data will be kept on the researcher’s personal laptop and secured Google Drive cloud. Hard copies of the data will be secured in a file cabinet in the researcher’s home. All data will be kept on file for 5 years.

Questions or Concerns:

Should you have any questions or concerns you may contact the researcher at hope.k@husky.neu.edu or via phone by calling 203-988-4004. If you would like to talk privately about your rights as a participant please contact the researcher’s advisor Dr. James Griffin at jam.griffin@husky.neu.edu.
Statement of Consent:
I read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision to participate. By signing below, I understand I am agreeing to the items outlined herein.

Print Name of Participant
Date of Consent
Participant’s Signature
Researcher’s Signature
Appendix E: In-Person Interview Protocol

Before interview: Hi (insert participant’s name), thank you for participating in this research. As you are aware I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University currently working on my doctoral thesis. The answers from your participation in this interview will be used to examine the lived experiences of Black women working in Connecticut Public State and Community College System. (I will read the informed consent verbatim and ask if the participant has any questions). Please note you can discontinue participation in this interview at any time.

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? Including where you grew up, committee involvement, and career goals/aspirations.
2. How would you describe your institution’s culture?
3. How are employee recognition/accolades handled on your campus?
4. How are criticism/ reprimands/ conflicts handled on your campus?
5. How are promotions and tenure determined on your campus? Have you applied for promotion or tenure on your campus? What was your experience? What was the outcome?
6. How would you describe the social reality on campus? (Schein, 2010, p. 117)
7. Are there different rules for different groups on your campus? Please explain.
8. How would you describe the culture for diverse populations on your campus?
9. Does your institution have a statement on diversity? If so/if not, how would you describe diversity on your campus? (Can you provide a copy of it?)
10. How would you describe leadership development opportunities for minorities at your institution?
11. How would you describe your experiences and realities as a black woman on campus?
12. How would you describe your experiences and realities as a black women working in higher education?
13. How would you describe your interactions with others who are not a part of your racial/ethnic group on campus?
14. How would you describe your interactions with those who are a part of your racial/ethnic group?
15. Are your opinions and contributions valued on your campus? Please explain.
16. How do you deal with challenges and successes in the workplace?
17. Is there anything else you’d like to add, expound on, or clarify?
Appendix F: Journal Prompt

During week one, please keep a journal of your experiences while attending meetings and interacting with colleagues. Please focus your journaling on the following questions:

1. How was your work day?

2. What emotions did I experience today? What prompted me to feel this way?