RACIAL IDENTITY AMONGST BLACK UNDERGRADUATE FEMALES WHO ATTEND PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS AND HOW IT IS LINKED TO THEIR COLLEGE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract

Colleges and universities are increasing their cultural and racial diversity, encouraging institutions of higher education to creatively develop opportunities for students to feel connected to their campus outside of the classroom. With the growth of racially diverse student bodies, many PWIs co-curricular opportunities need to serve the specific needs of students from a variety of backgrounds. Beyond academics, students enter into college with the need to feel connected to their institution and student involvement provides the opportunity to seek out ways to develop that connection. College student involvement is the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1999). As a student who identifies as a Black female progresses through their undergraduate years of college, how is their racial identity development linked to their student involvement path throughout college?

Three undergraduate, female students, who identify as Black or biracial (White and Black) participated in this study. They were able to provide vivid narratives of their life experiences as it related to the research topic. The detailed narratives focused on their racial identity development, female gender identity, and their college student involvement experiences at a predominantly White institution (PWI). Participants shared personal stories that directly spoke to their identity as a Black female student attending a PWI. In addition, the participants shared how their racial identity influenced their student involvement choices at their PWI.

The purpose of this study was to examine racial identity amongst Black, female, undergraduate students who attend a PWI and determine if their racial identity was linked to their student involvement. The study’s findings revealed that their Black racial identity did have an impact on how they chose to be involved at their PWI. Two participants disclosed that while
their racial identity did have an influence on their student involvement, it did not deter them from being involved on their campus. One participant shared that their racial identity deterred them from being involved in some student organizations, clubs, and activities on campus. Additional research is needed to uncover Black female and student involvement link at other institutional types and other women of color such as Latina, Asian American, Native American, and other groups of women of color.

*Keywords:* Black racial identity, college student involvement, student organizations/activities/associations, predominantly White institution
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Going to college encompasses more than what happens in the classroom. What happens outside of the classroom is importance but it also serves as an indicator for college persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reaffirmed that the impact of college is determined primarily by individual student effort and involvement in the curricular and co-curricular offerings on a campus. Webber, Bauer, and Zhang (2013) found, “students who reported more frequent engagement in academic and social activities earned higher grades and reported higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience” (p.604). More than 75% of students who leave college do so because of the difficulties related to a lack of fit between the skills and interest of the student, the organization of educational institutions and/or their formal structures, resources, and patterns of association (Schuetz, 2008; Tinto, 1993); whereas less than 25% of all students drop out because of academic failure (Schuetz, 2008; Tinto, 1993). A higher percentage of college attrition rates are as a result of students not finding their fit within their college beyond the classroom. Overall, the college experience satisfaction stems from outside the classroom and it is equally as valuable for students to become involved in college activities both inside and outside of the classroom (Astin, 1985).

As the need for a college degree continues to be the essential part of one’s resume, more than ever, the United States is acknowledging the importance of a college degree in order for upward movement in one’s career choices, economic status, and other parts of their livelihood. In the Fall of 2013, statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicated a total of 17.5 million undergraduate students (NCES, 2015). Out of the total student population, the racial breakdown included 9.9 million White students, 2.9 million Black students, 2.9
million Hispanic students, 1.0 million Asian students and 0.1 million American Indian/Native American and Pacific Islander students (NCES, 2015). In regard to the male/female ratio, females made up 56% of the student population (approximately 9.8 million) while males made of 44% (7.7 million) (NCES, 2015). A number of students are attending college with the purpose of obtaining a degree. However, in many cases, these students end up withdrawing from their institution of choice due to the fact that they lack a sense of full connectedness to the institution. The complete student college experience includes interactions and engagement beyond the classroom. A student’s desire to feel connected to a campus has a significant impact on whether or not a student will choose to persist or dropout. The college experience and the need to feel attached to one’s college/university differ for each student group. Even within each diverse student cluster (gender, sexual orientation, race, etc.) there are differences amongst how individuals determine their sense of connectedness to their institution. When it comes to underrepresented students pursuing higher education at a predominantly White institution (PWI), social integration plays a key role in their decisions to persist through college or leave without obtaining the degree. The term, “social integration” is defined as a student’s personal affiliations with peers, faculty, and staff that occur largely outside of the academic realm of the institution (Guffrida, 2003). According to Braxton (2001) “social integration positively influences subsequent institutional commitment and subsequent institutional commitment positively affects persistence in college” (p. 57). Social integration and involvement are essential to the overall college experience, specifically regarding the psychological and social aspects of being a college student. According to Harper and Quaye (2009), underrepresented students who attend PWIs often report their infrequent peer interactions with members of a dominant group. An example of guiding students towards feeling connected to their campus, particularly racial/ethnic minority
students, is to provide opportunities for these groups of students to formulate peer networks with groups of people with the racial/ethnic commonality (Quaye, Tambascia, & Talesh, 2009).

At PWIs, students of color express a variety of issues and concerns when it comes to being the minority on a predominantly White campus. Specifically concerning African American students, Watt (2006) states, “the attitude an African- American student develops at a PWI toward him or herself and others as social and racial beings are important parts of developing identity” (p.173). Black students attending PWIs tend to encounter more difficulty in social and academic integration (Chavous, 2002). Black student’s attending PWIs have reported feeling alienated and hyper-visible on campus due to their race. African American students who do not establish supportive communities at their PWI often experience feelings of discomfort, social isolation, and stress. Student involvement amongst students of color at PWIs is done in a more formal fashion through student organizations (Tinto, 1993). In particular, cultural student organizations help to maintain minority retention at PWIs (Guiffrida, 2003). While not all students of color, in particular Black students, engage in culturally based organizations, there is value in making connections through these types of organizations. Additional research conducted by Mitchell and Dell (1992) and Taylor and Howard – Hamilton (1995) indicated a link between racial identity and student involvement. Mitchell and Dell (1992), found connections between Black identity, psychosocial development, and participation in campus organizations. Lastly Taylor and Howard – Hamilton (1995) stated that many racial/ethnic minority students find themselves either subverting their identity, becoming involved in the mainstream campus, or assimilating as they struggle to maintain a strong cultural connection. Racial/ethnic minority students typically feel pressured to blend their cultures with the majority culture of the
institution, which leads to conformity to White mainstream campus norms or being socially isolated (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to examine racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students who attend predominately White institutions (PWI’s) and determine if their racial identity is linked to their student involvement.

**Justification for the Research Problem.** Colleges and universities are becoming more culturally and racially diverse. It has become essential for higher education institutions to creatively develop opportunities for students to feel connected to the campus outside of the academic component of college. It is a necessity for college campuses to have a developed campus involvement/student activities unit that provides the co-curricular and social integration opportunities within the institution. With the growth of culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse student bodies, many PWIs co-curricular opportunities must serve the specific needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Numerous studies have found a significant number of Black students reporting experiencing racial prejudice, discrimination, and feelings of isolation. Compared to their White peers, they were less likely to become involved within the campus community (Griffith, 2014). In emphasizing the importance of student involvement amongst Black undergraduate females at PWIs, the avoidance of isolation and alienation is crucial in order to forestall an increase in Black female undergraduate student dropout rate at PWIs (Chen, Ingram, and Davis, 2014). According to Fleming (1984), historically, Black female college students were less socially engaged and connected than their male counterparts (Fleming, 1984). Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson (1997) suggested that the support provided by programs targeted for African American women at PWIs is essential. In addition, providing an opportunity for racial and gender identity
is equally important (Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997). According to Ossana, Helms, & Leonard (1992), female undergraduates were not benefiting from the campus environment as well as assumed. First, their study found that women were simply adjusting and assimilating into their campus environment and were becoming less aware of their campus surroundings as they progressed throughout their college years. In addition, the study indicated that these students were dropping out of school as a result of their dissatisfaction with their overall campus atmosphere. Campus environment dissatisfaction tends to result in withdrawing from the institution. One’s unhappiness with their campus experience can be as a result of isolation, alienation, and marginalization, particularly amongst Black women and other groups of people of color attending a PWI. Research associated with female student identity development emphasizes the profound effect that social relationships have on females and gender development (Harris & Lester, 2009). Therefore, student involvement is the avenue for building social relationships that in turn has a significant impact on a female student’s overall college experience.

As professionals within the field of higher education, particularly working at PWIs, it is important to continue to be aware of underrepresented groups that experience the lack of institutional connectedness. Predominantly White institutions need to develop a sense of, “mattering” amongst the entire student population. Far too often, students of racial/ethnic minority groups feel a sense of marginalization on their campus, leading to a feeling of dissatisfaction. In 1985, Schlossberg was one of the first scholars of higher education to lay claim to the term “mattering”. To matter means to receive constant positive messages from peers, faculty and staff (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009). For an undergraduate, minority student, this source of positive messaging informs them that they belong and have the capacity to do well
Rosenberg & McCullough (1981) insisted that there were five dimensions of mattering: 1.) Attention; 2.) Importance; 3.) Dependence; 4.) Appreciation; 5.) Ego Extension. Rosenberg & McCullough (1981) believed that mattering is the feeling that others depend on the individual, are interested in the person or group, and are concerned with the fate of a particular person or groups of people, or view individuals as an ego extension. All students, particularly Black students at PWIs, have the desire to feel that they matter to one another and to the campus as a whole (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). According to Strayhorn (2012), students of color can inevitably experience marginality that often results from an unwelcoming environment that fails to appreciate, embrace, and engage diversity. A campus environment that presents this feeling of marginalization leads to this idea that one does not fit in and results in consciousness, irritability, and depression (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Racial/ethnic minority students not only have to manage the normal academic rigors of college but also the need to adjust to the predominantly White environment that is sometimes foreign, socially exclusive, culturally irresponsible, and wrought with contradictions (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Harper, Byars, Jelke, 2005; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998; Terenzini, Rendon, Ucraft, Miller, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994; Tinto, 1993). To overcome feelings of social isolation and marginality and enhance the atmosphere where every student feels mattered, students must be validated, welcomed, valued, and connected.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence.** While there are many ways in which the topic of student involvement amongst college students has been studied, there is a gap in this research that has been minimally explored. Much of the research related to racial identity amongst Black students and college student campus involvement tends to focus on the Black students as a monolithic
group (Harper & Quaye, 2007). There have been a handful of studies that have considered the male gender and how they perceive student involvement and their racial identity (Harper & Quaye, 2007). In addition, much of the research surrounding this topic examined the racial aspects of being Black verses considering multi-identities, such as gender outside of males.

Though there is a considerable amount of research that relates to either Black students as a whole or Black males and the impact student involvement has on their college experience, there is a lack of research that concentrates on Black females and student involvement. This study may reveal that there is an abundance of similarities between Black males and females however this study may also highlight the dissimilarities as it pertains to this topic. Exploring the Black female population will add an additional perspective from a different gender lens and will perhaps create a pathway to explore other women of color groups (such as Latina, Asian, etc.) and how their racial identity is linked to their student involvement at a PWI.

**Audience.** Exploring Black undergraduate women, their racial identity, and how it links to their college student involvement will be beneficial for Student Affairs and other college student development professionals. According to Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson (1997) “college student development professionals need not only acknowledge their own racial and gender identities but also assess factors that contribute to and hinder students’ racial and gender identity development” (pp. 294 – 295). Harper and Quaye (2009) convey the importance of listening to students in order to understand how to enhance their educational experiences. Through conducting a narrative inquiry qualitative study, themes will be generated from the participant’s experiences in order to grasp a deeper understanding of racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students and how it links to their student involvement at the PWI. As the researcher embarks on this qualitative study, the researcher will begin to see the
emergence of themes throughout each of the participant stories and will gain a more nuanced understanding of what is being articulated through their narratives. This topic may provide valuable information for understanding how to best support the needs of this student population.

**Significance of Research Problem**

As institutions of higher education continue to diversify their campuses racially and culturally, there comes a major benefit of understanding and appreciating human differences (Lundberg, 2010). By encouraging administrators and faculty of college campuses to become more sympathetic to human differences, students of color recognize that there is a sense of commitment to valuing their overall college experiences (Lundberg, 2010). In addition to understanding human differences within the campus climate, it is equally important to recognize that students of color enter college with a variety of identity factors that impact their overall view of themselves. As part of a student’s overall identity, specifically students of color, this includes their racial identity.

Understanding racial identity, particularly of Black females, and how this links to their campus involvement is beneficial to understanding how to incorporate support structures catering to the needs of Black undergraduate females at PWIs. There are a diverse amount of needs and desires Black female students have when it comes to determining their niche outside of the classroom. If these resources are not provided based on where they are in their racial identity journey, this could determine if that student graduates from or leaves that university.

The impact that may come from this study centers on the idea that there may be additional factors beyond pure interest that contribute to campus student involvement. For example, this type of study may impact those PWIs that do not have some form of a multicultural
center that serves as a hub for many underrepresented cultural and racial groups. These types of centers typically serve as means of decreasing the feeling of, “onlyness” at a PWI. The overall impact is to illuminate the idea that racial identity may play a key role in a Black female student’s campus involvement decision making and if so, how does this impact the work of student affairs and other college student development professionals. Developing an understanding of Black women’s struggles and successes in college, particularly at PWI’s, could help to identify strategies to implement better support Black female students and perhaps other underrepresented groups (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). As higher education professionals, it is important to realize that support structures for Black women need to be included into the mainstream of campus. While this study focuses on Black undergraduate women, it is anticipative that the findings of this study will be applicable to not only Black undergraduate women, but also women of color in other minority groups as well.

The study will be guided by the following research question and sub-questions:

How do Black female college students make sense of their student involvement at a PWI?

Sub-questions:

How do Black female college students racial identity influence their campus involvement at a PWI?

How do Black female college students pre-college experiences influence their college student involvement?

How do Black female college students perceive their racial identity as a student at a PWI?
How do Black female college students perceive the ways in which institutions have adapted to their needs?

How do Black female college student think institutions should adapt to their needs?

**Theoretical Framework**

**Historical Context.** Theory is a framework through which interpretation and understanding are constructed. Theory is used to describe human behavior to explain, predict, and generate new knowledge, practices, and research (Harper & Quaye, 2009; McEwan, 2003). This research will be explored through the theoretical framework of Critical Race Feminism (CRF). CRF is closely connected to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is considered a branch of CRT. CRT is the source of CRF and connects race with power, oppression, and conflict (Berry, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Both CRF and CRT originated in the field of legal studies (Childers – McKee & Hytten, 2015). CRF emerged from CRT as a result of racial and/or ethnic legal women scholars feeling excluded by their male peers and White feminist legal scholars (Few, 2007). Berry (2015) describes CRF as an “outgrowth of CRT that addresses the intersections of race and gender” (p. 428). Critical Race Feminism borrows concepts from both critical legal studies and critical race theory (Thompson, 2003).

CRF acknowledges, addresses, and accepts racial experiences as different from those who identify as male and from women who identify as non-women of color (Berry, 2010). CRF also recognizes the multiple and intersectionality of identities amongst women of color. Degaldo (2012) defines intersectionality as the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combination plays out in various settings. While CRF recognizes the intersectionality of a woman’s identity, it also focuses on the multitude of factors affecting the
oppression of and discrimination against women—particularly women of color (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007; Wing, 1999). It challenges the notion of a unified ‘women’s universal experience’ (Rubinstein – Avila, 2007; Flores, 2000). Critical Race Feminism places women of color in the center, rather than the margins, of the discussion, debate, and research (Berry, 2010).

One of the attractions in favoring CRF is the value it places on storytelling. CRF includes the methodological concepts of storytelling, narrative, voice, auto-ethnography, and phenomenology (Pratt-Clarke, 2012). Stories and narratives typically incite the process of correction in our system by bringing attention to neglected evidence and reminding people of humanity (Delgado, 2012). Critical Race Feminism tends to focus on the voices of the other and the silenced, as well as the voice that can counter supremacy, oppressions, racism, and sexism (Pratt – Clarke, 2012). According to Housee (2010), CRF honors the voices of those who have been marginalized and challenges the traditional methods of research. In conducting a narrative inquiry study, the stories, experiences, and narratives of each participant assists in the discovery of the emerging themes of the research, while still recognizing the individualism of the research that will be conducted.

**The Tenets of Critical Race Feminism.** Within CRT, there are six basic tenets that help to frame the ideas of this theory. Due to the fact that CRF stems from CRT, the tenets are transferrable between the two. The basic tenets discussed by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) are: 1.) Ordinariness; 2.) Interest convergence or material determinism; 3.) Social Construction; 4.) Differential racialization; 5.) Intersectionality and anti-essentialism; 6.) A unique voice of order.

Ordinariness explains the fact that racism is difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). According to Delgado & Stefancic (2001), racism and discrimination are matters of thinking, mental categorization, attitude, and discourse. Interest
convergence or material determinism is when racism advances the interest of both White elites (materialistically) and the working class Caucasians (physically) (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Racism goes beyond having unfavorable thoughts about or impressions of other groups, rather it is a way by which society allocates privilege and status (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Social construction, as described by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), is explained as race being a product of social thought and relations. Races are categories that society invents to manipulate or superannuate when convenient. Race has no correspondence to biological or genetic reality. Differential racialization is described as ways in which dominant society racializes minority groups at different times. Intersectionality and anti-essentialism, concepts later explored in the literature review, is based off the fact that no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Race is a fragment of one’s identity and multi-identities contribute to the makeup of a person. The last tenet discusses people of color having a unique voice. Due to this tenet, the voices represented by people of color are no longer muffled sounds within the background.

It is beneficial to consider the tenets when developing a study that incorporates CRF. While CRF draws from the tenets of CRT, CRF recognizes notions of feminism (Berry, 2009). When conducting a study that focuses on racial and/or ethnic identity, it is important to understand that these identities are aligned with many other facets of a person’s overall individuality. It is crucial to remember that several parts of one’s full identity are influencers of their own racial/ethnic identity. Contributing racial/ethnic identity within a study involves a number of overlapping identities that may factor into a participants thoughts and ideas. Due to this, it is imperative that the researcher appreciates the multifaceted identities of an individual. In addition to understanding intersectionality, it is necessary to consider the outliers that may be
affecting one’s racial identity. Some of those outliers may include racism and discrimination that may occur on their predominantly White campus. This is not to assume that racism and discrimination occurs on every PWI, but research indicates that racism and discrimination does indeed occur. Racism and discrimination potentially experienced by participants of this study may impact how participants comprehend their own racial identity development. CRF gives a unique voice to woman of color. The participant is the expert of their owned lived experiences and through their voice the researcher is able to develop concepts and themes that can answer the proposed research questions.

**Critiques of Critical Race Feminism.** Critical Race Feminism utilizes storytelling/narratives as a means of qualitatively collecting data. The critique of storytelling is the concern of merit, truth, objectivity, and the matter of voice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). According to Delgado & Stefancic (2001), critiques believe that storytelling stifles discussion and debate. Some researchers believe that storytelling lacks analytical rigor and can convey many different messages.

Another criticism mentioned in Delgado & Stefancic (2001) is the lack of concern with truth. Critical race theorists have been criticized for having the belief that truth is socially constructed, leading to misstated facts.

**CRF: Shedding Light on the Research Problem.** Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) state, “there is a need for more scholarship in the field of education that looks at the educational experiences and schooling processes of African-American females” (p.12). While there is some research that hones in on Black females within education, particularly postsecondary education, the majority of the research focuses on the racial group as a whole or specifically on males. When considering studies on this particular racial group, one of the widely used theories is
Critical Race Theory. Although this theory is a valued theory to utilize when studying racial groups, CRT tends to have a whole group perspective rather than a gender-focused direction. Therefore, this theory does not typically place emphasis on the experiences, narratives, and ideas of women within a particular racial/ethnic group. Eloquently stated, “Critical race feminism is a useful framework for representing and speaking to the experiences of Black females in educational spaces” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 16). Author Theodorea Regina Berry (2010) defines CRF as, “suiting the sensibilities that acknowledge, addresses, and accepts Black female experiences as different from Black male and womanhood as different from women not of color” (p.23).

Critical Race Feminism is the theory that was designed to offer the possibility for understanding and researching the experiences of women of color. This theory acknowledges that the experiences of women of color are different from other groups and allows for their stories, experiences, and ideas to be at the forefront of research, rather than within the perimeters. CRF can shed new light on this particular research topic by providing a framework that allows for the voices of women of color to be heard. The utilization of CRF as a theoretical framework results in critical change within a particular field.

CRF provides a framework through which Black undergraduate females who attend a PWIs may discuss their racial identity and their college experience in relation to student involvement. CRF helps to carefully listen to the participants. Through CRF, the researcher begins with the experiences of the participants as a way to unpack more complex theoretical ideas and connects theory to practice (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Berry, 2010). CRF is a theory that comes to understand the lives and lived experiences of women of color. Critical Race Feminism is the path where both the researcher and the participant can learn concurrently.
Summary and Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized according to the exploration of racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students attending PWIs and how it links to their student involvement. Chapter one reveals the problem statement and will introduce the research topic. It is also designed to justify the reasoning for conducting this research, exploring the deficiencies within the research, providing the suggested audience in which this research will be of interest, as well as expose the research questions guiding the research. The theoretical framework will also be explored within chapter one. Chapter two, the literature review, will seek to explore a number of areas that will provide insight and history on relevant themes that will help support this area of study. The topics of discovery within the literature review include: Theoretical Perspectives of Student Involvement; Historical and Theoretical Perspectives of Black Racial Identity; Black Female Identity. Chapter three will explore the research methodology used to investigate the problem, as well as information about the participants, data collection and analysis, and additional information that will exist within the qualitative method of research used throughout this study. In addition, chapter three will include the necessary steps taken to protect the study participants. Chapter four includes a detailed analysis of the data collected from the participant interviews, observations, and any supplementary field notes. In addition, a discussion of themes revealed during the data analysis phase will be shared in chapter four. In conclusion, chapter five provides recommendations for practice, implications for future research, and any limitations of the research.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are applicable to this study:
**Student Involvement:** the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1999)

**Student Organizations/Activities/Associations:** student-led extracurricular or co-curricular groups, clubs, or organizations within the institutions (Astin, 1999)

**African American:** a person having origins in any of the Black racial group of Africa (Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Kena, Kewal, Kemp, Biano, Dinkes, 2009)

**Black:** inclusive of those who identify as West Indian, African, African American, bi or multi-racial in which a portion of their racial identity is Black

**White:** a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East (Planty et al., 2009)

**Predominantly White Institutions:** colleges/universities that have or have historically had a majority White student population; also referred to as PWI
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Dating back to the 1960s, nearly two-third to three-fourth of the Black students in college attended predominantly White colleges due to large recruitment efforts of these types of institutions (Astin, 1975). In the 1970s, Black students attending PWIs began to express their concerns of feeling socially isolated on predominantly White campuses, resulting in deprived social lives for many Black students on predominantly White campuses. A study conducted by the Southern Regional Educational board indicated, “Black students from five PWIs reported feeling detached from the institution and expressed a need for more opportunities to become involved in the full range of campus life” (Astin, 1975, p.283). Fast forwarding to present day, Black students attending PWIs continue to express similar attitudes regarding their overall college experience at a PWI.

The term social integration, as discussed in chapter one, is defined as a student’s personal affiliation with peers, faculty, and staff that occur largely outside of the academic realm of the institution (Guffrida, 2003). How students perceive themselves racially contributes to their social and academic outcomes at PWIs (Chavous, 2000). Students consider becoming involved on campus in ways such as joining organizations that correlate with their academic major, hobbies, interest, culture/race, etc. While there has been minimal research pertaining to Black racial identity and student involvement, there are researchers who have developed theories and ideas related to this topic. Jacoby (1991) found that there are specific themes that correlate with the dissatisfaction of the African American college experience at PWIs. One of the contributing factors to dissatisfaction is a poor selection of campus activities related to African American student life experiences (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995; Jacoby, 1991). According to
Chavous (2002), “much research indicates that African American students encounter difficulty in social and academic integration” (p.142). Mallinckrodt & Sedlecek (2009) indicate that African American involvement in campus organizations equals a greater likelihood that the student will identify with the institution and remain in school. The lack of campus involvement may be a result of being on a college campus that does not correlate with or enrich a student’s cultural and social experience (Taylor & Howard – Hamilton, 1995). In order for colleges and universities to see a continued increase in enrollment and persistence amongst students of color (specifically Black female undergraduate students), conscious efforts must be made to explore ways to connect the institution to the needs of this student population and their cultural and racial group (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995).

Understanding the different levels of a student’s racial and gender identity is important to consider when exploring this research topic. Approaching this research with the intention to listen and hear each person’s story is crucial in order to view each person from an individualistic lens. While no Black female undergraduate college student’s experience is identical, there are multiple themes commonly found in the literature. Harper (2013) found three shared experiences amongst generations of Black students attending or who have attended PWIs: 1.) onlyness; 2.) niggering; 3.) the shortage of same-race faculty role models. “Onlyness” is the most relevant to the dissertation research. Onlyness, a term introduced by Harper, is defined as, “the psycho-emotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one’s same racial or ethnic group”(Harper, 2013, p.189). This can be a significant concern relevant to Black female students who attend PWIs. This can be combated by providing a plethora of student involvement activities that can provide students
the opportunity to lessen the feeling of onlyness and increase their sense of belonging while in college.

Black racial identity may play a role in the overall experience for Black female undergraduate students attending a PWI. It may be a contributing factor in the process that determines their student involvement decision(s). The goal of this study is to provide PWIs, especially their student affairs professionals, with an understanding of racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students and how it links to student involvement decision making. Understanding the possible connection of these two concepts may allow for the generation of ideas related towards supporting the co-curricular needs of Black female undergraduate students attending PWIs.

Although Freeman (1999) focuses her research on high achieving Black students on college campuses, much of her findings can be attributed to Black female college students. Freeman (1999) states, “high achieving Black students drop out of college not due to their inability to do college level work but rather a lack of support and connectedness” (Freeman, 1999). Feeling a sense of connectedness to one’s college campus includes the belief that they are a member of a community within their institutional setting and there is social support within the curricular and the co-curricular aspects of the campus (Strayhorn, 2012). This statement can hold true to a high percentage of Black female undergraduate students attending PWIs.

At PWIs, students of color (which includes Black female undergraduate students) express a variety of different issues and concerns when it comes to being the minority on a majority White campus. “Black students have been boxed in based on stereotypes about their race, assumptions about their abilities, and about their social activities and behaviors” (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p.520).
This literature review will explore three streams of research: 1) student involvement, 2) Black racial identity, and 3) Black female identity. The first stream of literature, related to student involvement, will explore two student involvement theories that are most commonly used throughout literature: Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement (1985) and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1993). In addition to examining student involvement, the literature will explore one’s sense of belonging and how student involvement contributes to one’s belongingness on a college campus. The second stream of literature related to Black racial identity will focus on three frequently used Black racial identity theories and provide the historical context of each theory: Cross’s Nigrescence Theory (1971; 1991), Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (1987), Racial Socialization (1980). The third stream of literature will focus on Black female identity and will include the discussion of the Womanist Identity theory. This study deals with the intersectionality of two identities (race and gender) as it is crucial to explore female gender identity and how it pertains to Black women. Exploring these three streams of literature separately allows for a thorough understanding of these areas as separate entities before moving forward with the study that encompasses them altogether.

**Theoretical Perspectives of Student Involvement**

In order to have a full understanding of this research study, it is necessary to differentiate between the terms student involvement and student engagement. The term student involvement, “refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1999, p.518). Student involvement is concerned with how students spend their time and how various institutional actors, processes, and opportunities facilitate development (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Student involvement in college matters and can result in a greater sense of attachment to the campus (Astin, 1999).
Student engagement is defined as, “participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside of the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes” (Harper & Quaye, 2009, pp. 2-3). Kezar and Kinzie (2006) define student engagement as, “time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities and the extent to which the institution gets students to participate in activities that lead to student success” (p.150). As defined by Strayhorn (2012), student engagement is the amount of time and effort students devote to academic responsibilities and other activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success. Engagement relates to how institutions invest resources and structured learning opportunities to encourage students to participate in and benefit from those opportunities (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Harper and Quaye (2009) identify two important features in student engagement: 1) the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities; and 2) how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes (p.3). According to Harper and Quaye (2009) it is possible for an individual to be involved without being engaged.

There are distinct differences between student involvement and student engagement. For example, student engagement presupposes student success while student involvement connotes behaviors and actions (Strayhorn, 2012). Student involvement is what students do and how they behave in college (Strayhorn, 2012). The term student involvement is the selected term that will be used throughout this study. The reason for selecting this term verses student engagement is because the term student engagement focuses more on academic involvement while student
involvement focuses more on the non-academic. The study focuses on the student involvement of campus organizations, associations, and clubs and what occurs outside of the classroom.

Two theories are widely considered when examining college student involvement: Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement (1985) and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1993). These two theories are the focus of the student involvement section of this literature review for several reasons. First, the elements of these theories are simple to navigate and understand. Second, both theories help to explain the importance of environmental surroundings and how that impacts a college student’s success. Finally, both theories can be used to guide a study related to aspects of college student development. While both of these theories are great to consider when discussing college student involvement, it is important to understand that frequently these theories are neglectful in understanding student’s based on their multiple identities. Therefore, these theories should be reviewed under a microscope when applying them to different student groups.

The Theory of Involvement “emphasizes active participation of the student learning process” (Astin, 1999, p.522). Astin (1975) reaffirms that student involvement and identification with an activity or program at an institution is related to an increased probability that a student will remain in school. This theory explicitly acknowledges that the psychological and physical time and energy of students are limited (Astin, 1999). According to Astin (as cited by Richmond, 1986), student involvement provides a common objective on which everybody at the institution can focus. Astin (1984) proposed five basic assumptions in his theory: 1) Involvement entails the investment of physical and psychological energy in different “objects” that range in the degree of specificity; 2) Involvement occurs along a continuum with students investing varying degrees of energy in several objects at different times; 3) Involvement includes
qualitative and quantitative components; 4) The amount of student learning and development is directly proportional to the qualitative and quantitative of involvement; 5) The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement (p.298). Student involvement is typically associated with student retention. While student enrollment rate is important to the statistics of higher education institutions, student retention has emerged as a strong academic focal point. The student retention rate statistic is a key indicator of student graduation rate. Student involvement is a contributing factor to student retention on college campuses. “Campus student organizations serve as significant social networks for students on college campuses and serve as important links for students to campus life and to the institution” (Kuh & Banning, 2010, p.354).

According to the stories from participants of a study conducted by Terrell Strayhorn (2012), there are four ways involvement impacts a college students sense of belonging and connectedness to a college campus: 1) Connecting students with others who share their interests, values, and commitments; 2) Familiarizing students with the campus environment and ecology; 3) Affirming students identity interests and values as part of the campus; 4) Generating feelings among students that they matter and other’s depend on them (p.115). According to Strayhorn (2012), “involvement has a direct influence on students’ sense of connectedness and belonging in college (p. 113).

Vincent Tinto (1993), the developer of the Theory of Student Departure, found that a student’s personal affiliation with peers, faculty and staff occur largely outside of the academic realm of the institutions (Guffrida, 2003). “Tinto theorized that student characteristics form individual degree goals and institutional commitments which interrelate over time with collegiate experiences to persuade one’s decision to depart from college” (Strayhorn, 2012, p.31). In
addition, Tinto highlighted the influence of student involvement in academic and social systems that play a crucial role in predicting student departure decisions (Strayhorn, 2012). Students who successfully combine their academic and social lives at an institution are more likely to remain in school (Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 2009). This finding supports the importance of student involvement on campus. Further research confirms that a student who is involved in campus activities is more likely to feel part of and connected to the college campus (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Tinto’s model has often been criticized due to the lack of diversity in population sample and neglecting the perspectives of minority populations. Tinto’s theory often assumed that the assimilation to the campus climate of minority students was a prerequisite for success in a majority environment (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Tierney (2000) indicated that Tinto’s model frequently accepts that the students should assimilate into the mainstream, which has historically afforded privileges to those who are White, protestant, heterosexual, and from upper-middle class backgrounds.

Finding one’s fit at a college or university comes with fulfilling the student needs of what is offered outside of the classroom. If a student feels connected to something on the campus, this contributes to a lower attrition rate. The less connected, the less likely a student feels as though they fit within the campus. College attrition can be attributed to a lack of fit between student and institution (Guffrida, 2003). As student affairs professionals, it is important to develop a campus environment that has something for everyone. Students who perceive their norms, values, and ideas as congruent with the institution are more likely to become academically and socially integrated (Guffrida, 2003). Those who do not will experience more difficulty with the campus integration process, resulting in less persistence and obtaining the degree. “All students need to
feel like they matter on campus… students of color, in particular, can feel marginalized more often than they feel like they matter” (Jackson, 1998, p.359).

Student involvement and their decision to depart from a campus before completing their studies can all be linked to one’s sense of belonging. Throughout this section of the literature review, there has been considerable reference to the phrase, “sense of belonging”. A sense of belonging in terms of college students is defined as, “a student’s perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness” (Strayhorn, 2012, p.3). It is the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by and important to a group on campus. A sense of belonging contains both cognitive and affective elements in that the individual cognitive evaluation of his or her role in relation to the group results in affective response (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

In an address to the United States, former President Barack Obama once mentioned, “it is important for students to feel safe and have a sense of belonging in our country’s college and university educational settings” (Strayhorn, 2012). A college student’s decision to become involved on their college campus can be closely linked to their desire to “wet their sense of belonging appetite” (Strayhorn, 2012, p.24). A sense of belonging is particularly meaningful to those who perceive themselves as marginal to the mainstream life of college (for example students of color attending PWIs) (Strayhorn, 2012; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). As mentioned by Strayhorn (2012), if student needs are not satisfied in education settings, they have difficulty sustaining commitment in an environment where they do not feel personally valued and welcomed. An absence of a sense of belonging on a college campus can result in alienation or marginality, possibly leading to a student’s decision to leave that campus.
With PWI’s becoming more diverse, it is crucial that institutions of higher learning stop assuming that a student must integrate into the institution, rather than challenging the institution to adapt to the needs of students (Winkle – Wagner, 2009). Higher education professionals, particularly those who work in Student Affairs, need to re-think what it means to provide an inclusive environment and must realize the responsibility should not be solely placed on the student.

**Historical and Theoretical Perspectives of Black Racial Identity**

This section will explore the historical and theoretical perspectives of Black racial identity. It is designed to set a foundation for understanding racial identity as a whole amongst Black people. First, the term, “racial identity” and “Black racial identity” will be defined. Following will be an explanation of the different types of racial identity theories. The racial identity theories and models explored in this section are some of the most utilized racial and ethnic identity theories used in research specific to race and ethnicity. These theories were created to explain (or attempt to explain) Black identity and Black consciousness processes for Black Americans (Constantine, Richardson, Benjamin, & Wilson, 1998). Many of these models were developed from the qualitative experiences of the participants from a variety of research studies. The one’s that will be explored in this section of the literature review include: Cross’s Nigrescence Theory, Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity, and Stevenson’s Racial Socialization Theory. While there are additional theories related to Black Racial Identity (BRI), the above theories are frequently referenced. Before embarking on the exploration of the mentioned theories, it is important to provide an understanding of how racial identity and Black racial identity are defined.
Helms (1990) defines racial identity as a theory that involves the examination of the extent to which people of color perceived themselves to share a common racial heritage with their ascribed racial group. Rotheram & Phinney (1984) define racial identity as the examination of one’s sense of belonging to a particular racial group and the impact that sense of belonging has on one’s thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior. Additional literature defines racial identity as the feeling of closeness to similar others in ideas, feelings, and thoughts (Demo & Hughes, 1990).

Ruth Horowitz, a pioneer in the field, began exploring Black racial identity (BRI) in 1939. Black racial identity is described as “the attitudes and beliefs that an African American or a Black person has about his or her belonging to the Black race individually, the Black race collectively, and their perceptions of other racial groups” (DeCuir- Gunby, 2009, p.103). Ford and Harris (1997) state, “racial identity development is the process of coming to terms with one’s racial group membership as a salient reference group” (p.105). According to Harris and Lester (2009), a person’s identity as a whole, including their racial identity, is fluid, subjective, and contextually bound, and is not singular.

These different racial identity theories and models were created in an attempt to explain Black identity and Black consciousness processes for Black Americans (Constatine, Richard, Benjamin, & Wilson, 1998). Brown, et.al. (2013) stated, “racial identity models serve as a conceptual framework to help professionals and practitioners become more cognizant and sensitive to race issues that influence attitudes and behaviors of members of that racial group” (p.108). The different racial identity theories and models explored in this section are some of the most prominent racial and ethnic identity theories used in research specific to racial and ethnic identity development.
**Cross’s Nigrescence Theory.** Cross’s Nigrescence Theory (1971, 1991) is one of the most widely used theories in BRI and includes five different stages of BRI development. Nigrescence is a French term that means the process of becoming or converting to Blackness (Cross, 1994; Akbar, 1989). While an undergraduate student at Fisk University between 1883 and 1888, W.E.B. DuBois proclaimed that he became Negro (Cross, 1994), foreshadowing the concept behind Nigrescence theory, though the actual naming and dedication of identity development models is a more recent event (Cross, 1994). According to Akbar (1989), “Cross’s initial concept of Black identity formation was prompted by his observation of events that occurred during the 1960s and a growing number of Black Americans began changing their self-images, perceptions, attitudes, and social behaviors” (p. 258). Cross’s Nigrescence Model alludes to the belief that Blackness is a role formation that emerges from significant environmental and social interactions (Akbar, 1989). It is a process of exploration and discovery for the individual to acquire a strong sense of African American or Black identity and is theorized as a development progression (Sanders Thompson, 2011; Cross, 1971). According to Watts (2006), “Cross’s Nigrescence Theory describes the movement toward understanding self as a racial being for African Americans in five stages” (p.172). Those stages include: 1.) Pre-Encounter; 2.) Encounter; 3.) Immersion-Emersion; 4.) Internalization; 5.) Internalization-Commitment.

The Pre-Encounter stage is where many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture are absorbed (Cross, 1994). The Encounter stage is typically preempted by an event or series of events that forces the individual to recognize the impact racism has on one’s life. Once this event or these events are experienced, the individual is faced with the reality he or she cannot truly be White. The Immersion/Emersion stage is one where the individual has the desire to submerge their being with everything pertaining to their race, typically avoiding the White
community and its cultural norms in their entirety. Internalization is the stage in which the individual is still maintaining their connections with their fellow Black peers while establishing valuable relationships with their White peers. Lastly, the Internalization-Commitment stage is where the individual is committed to their Blackness in a positive manner and is invested in the concerns of the Black race as a whole. According to Nobles (1989), “the Nigrescence Model begins with people who place low salience on being Black, but in the aftermath of a challenging encounter moves to find a way to change their identity to make it reflect high salience for race” (p.123). Sanders Thompson (2001) posits, “African American identification is part of the process by which a self is constructed, understood, and has met a basic psychological need” (p. 164).

Being met with criticism, Cross’s Nigrescence Theory has undergone numerous revisions in order to accommodate the ever changing growth in Black racial identity. Nigrescence Theory has often been criticized for its lack of paying attention to the variability and diversity of Blackness. Due to this criticism, the revised version of this theory incorporates multiple identity clusters (Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001). The integration of clusters changes the theory from a singular to a multi approach to racial identity.

**Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity.** As defined by Baber (2012), Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), “attempts to understand the significance of African American identity in individual self-conceptualization and the meaning attributed to association with African American collectivity” (p. 68). MMRI is similar to Nigrescence Theory however instead of viewing racial identity development in stages, it perceives racial identity development through four dimensions: 1) Racial salience; 2) Centrality of identity; 3) Regards is when a person associates a group with the identity; 4) Ideology associated with
identity (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). One of the greatest assets of this model is that it, “attempts to combine the strengths of both the mainstream and underground approaches of studying African American or Black racial identity” (Sellers et al., 1998, p.23). Racial salience refers to the level at which one’s race is infused with one’s self-concept. Centrality is the idea that race is the central and normative part of one’s self-concept. Regard is defined as the negative and/or positive judgement of one’s race. Finally, Ideology is the perceptions and beliefs of how one’s race should act.

Baber (2012) explains that in addition to the four dimensions associated with MMRI, this model also consists of four philosophical paradigms: a.) a nationalist philosophy; b.) an oppressed minority philosophy; c.) an assimilation philosophy; and d.) a humanist philosophy. Each of the philosophical paradigms places emphasis on a certain aspect of one’s identity development. The nationalist philosophy places emphasis on isolated self-direction for African Americans. An oppressed minority philosophy emphasizes the similarities African Americans have with other oppressed groups. The third paradigm, assimilation philosophy, places emphasis on similarities with the dominant group. The last paradigm, the humanist philosophy, places importance on commonality among all humans. According to Baber (2012), “MMRI provides evidence that racial identity development is not a homogeneous process across the African American collectivity” (p. 69). This model perpetuates the idea that racial identity development is not a step by step process but rather that racial identity development occurs in varied forms depending on the other identities and experiences of the individual. This is a theory that jumps from each dimension and a person does not necessarily experience their racial identity development through a linear stage order.
MMRI has been criticized as to whether or not this can serve as a meta-framework for examining other group identities (Sellers, et al, 1998). Some researchers believe that parts of the model can be attributed to other group identities but it is up for debate as to whether or not the entire model is transferrable.

**Racial Socialization.** Racial socialization was initially designed to study the racial identity development of African American children. In numerous cases, Demo and Hughes (1990) has ignored the social psychological processes that sculpt the identity of adults. Greene (1990) defines racial socialization as what Black parents communicate to Black children about what it means to be a Black American, what they may expect from Black and White persons, how to cope with it and whether or not the disparaging messages of the broader culture are true.

Racial Socialization Theory (1993) is, “the process by which Black individuals develop a healthy racial identity” (Anglin & Wade, 2007, p. 207). While much of racial socialization was focused on children, Stevenson (1994) developed the Scale of Racial Socialization for adolescents to assess the importance of racial socialization in the African American community (Thompson, 2000). Stevenson found four stable factors associated with racial socialization: 1) Spiritual and Religious Coping (the importance of spirituality in dealing with problems); 2) Extended Family Caring (the value of the role that the extended family has in the raising and nurturing of a child); 3) Cultural Pride Reinforcement (the importance of teaching of Black culture and history to children); 4) Racism Awareness Teaching (teaching children to be prepared for the racism they will encounter) (Thompson, 2000). Unnever and Gabbidon (2011) discovered four dimensions of racial socialization: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). In theory, racial
socialization serves as the buffer against racist encounters and further explores the idea of college adjustment as it pertains to racial socialization and identity (Anglin & Wade, 2007).

**Conclusion to Black Racial Identity.** BRI comes in diverse forms. For example, one may follow the stages of Cross’s Nigrescence Theory (1971;1991) by following in the order described, while others racial identity journey may have no specific stage order but rather will go from stage one to stage three, back to stage one then to stage four and so on. Harris and Lester (2009) eloquently state, “identity does not develop through a single process or at one time” (p.106). The distinctive theories related to Black racial identity serves as a framework in approaching a study. It is equally important to recognize that in developing one’s racial identity, there may be developmental issues that coincide with Black students as they recognize their multiple stages of Black racial identity. According to Porter and Washington (1979), not all Blacks respond to the same racial identity. A person’s socioeconomic status and a person’s personality are examples of what may be considered contributing factors. Racial identity is a multidimensional construct, often incorporating additional aspects of one’s overall identity that contribute to sense of self and provides people of color with a sense of belonging (Sanders Thompson, 2001). McEwen, Roper, Bryant, and Langa (1990) indicated nine major development issues related to identity and while each of them are relevant to this study, two are particularly significant: developing racial and ethnic identity and developing identity. Howard-Hamilton (1997) states that developing ethnic and racial identity, “involves instilling ethnic identity and information and facts on Black self-consciousness development while developing identity means to, “enhance one’s own unique and diverse characteristics, societal interaction, and group identification” (p.19). Racial identity often serves as a means of buffering the acts of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes in which many Black people face in society.
(Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). The journey towards developing one’s racial identity is combined with conflict, challenge, pain, confusion, self-reflection, and growth (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009). In exploring racial identity within a study, it is important to understand that a participant is juggling several emotions that may emerge. In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge that researchers must understand the varying attitudes towards racial identity that people of color, particularly Black people possess (Sander Thompson, 2001). Stewart (2015) explains, “development theorists identified the college experience as a prominent site for considerations of racial identity as part of a construction of self” (p.240).

In concluding this section of the literature review, it is important to understand that a Black female student matriculating into a PWI may experience challenges within their racial identity development process (Wilson & Constantine, 1999).

**Black Female Identity**

While theories have been developed related to racial identity, gender identity, and student involvement, these philosophies generally serve as roadmaps for further research. While much of the literature related to the research has been focused on student development and Black racial identity, gender is also an important component to consider as it pertains to the role of Black female student racial identity and college student involvement. From a feminist post-structuralist lens, “gender is not a fixed characteristic, but rather one that is produced, negotiated, and reinforced within social structures (Harris & Lester, 2009, p.107). The student experience across all races and genders comes in diverse forms. Chavous (2002) notes, “frameworks examining gender in education that may have been developed and tested in White student populations may not accurately describe Black students” (p.143).
The focus of this section will be on Black females and their racial and gender identity. This will begin with the discussion of oppression and stereotypes in which Black female college students encounter. From there, the different requisites of Blackness will be examined. This section will explore terms associated with the Black female identity, such as, “floater” and “bridge builder”. After discussing terminologies, the intersectionality and obstacles associated with Black female identity development at a PWI will be deliberated. This section will include an overview of Womanist Identity Model and the apprehensions in relation to Black females will be discussed.

According to Lisa Jackson (1998), Black women who attend PWIs are more socially assertive and independent than those who attend HBCUs. In Jackson’s study, some participants shared what it meant to be a Black woman: struggle, being oppressed, working harder than others to be successful, fighting the negative stereotypes, and fighting battles against racism and discrimination. Some stated explicitly that being a Black woman can be problematic. Hesse – Biber, et al (2010) conducted a qualitative study based around racial identity and body image amongst Black female college students attending PWIs. While listening to the narratives and experiences of the participants, the researchers discovered common themes amongst the different groups of female participants. The participants that fell into group one expressed their identity to be in conjunction with White culture. Most of the participants that were in this group were those who grew up in predominantly White neighborhoods and went to predominantly White schools. The second group categorized themselves as Black and proud. The participants in this group identified with Black culture prior to and during college and their gender identity was closely associated with their hair, skin color, and thickness of their body shape. This group fully accepted their Black racial identity and had a sense of pride. Members of group three were
considered the “floaters” as they believed they were “not Black enough and not White enough”. Their social class provided them with resources to identify with the White culture while also having a strong connection with Black culture. Last, members of group four were considered the “bridge builders” (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). This group of females did not necessarily align with one particular racial or cultural group, rather they grew up in diverse communities that afforded them the opportunity to engage with people from multiple backgrounds. The “bridge builders” are typically accepted by both White and Black.

There is not a “one size fits all” method to racial identity when it comes to those who identify as female. One’s gender identification can have a major impact on their racial identity journey, as both gender’s experiences are considered to be significantly different based on societal pressures, norms, and stereotypes. Winkle-Wagner (2009) coined the term, “two-ness” which is defined as a Black woman having to behave and be one way on campus and a different way in other settings. The term two-ness is similar to, “double-consciousness” which was described by W.E.B. Dubois as, “the notion that Black people in the United States have to navigate two selves: 1.) White American norms and 2.) Being Black (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). It is equally important to acknowledge, “female college students take on multiple identities while in college that are oftentimes related to their involvement in campus activities and student organizations” (Harris & Lester, 2009, p. 101). Taub & McEwen (1992) indicate that Black women may experience a PWI as a barrier to their identity development due to current or past racial injustices.

As this study focuses on Black females, it would be a disservice to move forward and fail to reference Helms Womanist Identity Development Model. Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011) related womanist identity to self-esteem, perceptions of environmental bias, and gender role
exceptions. Helms Womanist Identity Development Model emulates the stages of Cross’s Nigrescence Theory but associates the stages to women and their emergence of accepting their gender identity as a woman. Ossana, Helms, and Leonard (1992) suggested, “women’s abandonment of external definition and adaptation of internal standards of womanhood occur through a stage-wise developmental process” (p. 403). While Helms Womanist Identity Development Model is being highlighted, it is imperative to recognize, “women have multiple identities associated with race, socioeconomic class, religion, and sexuality that impact their gender development” (Harris & Lester, 2009, p. 106).

The Womanists Identity Development Model is comprised of four stages: 1.) Pre-Encounter (Womanist I); 2.)Encounter (Womanist II); 3.)Immersion-Emersion (Womanist III); 4.) Internalization (Womanist IV). The pre-encounter stage represents a woman who has accepted the traditional gender roles and is in a state of denial of the societal biases that may be considered oppressive (Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996). The second stage of this model, the encounter stage, is the phase in which a woman begins to question and is in a perplexed state about gender roles. Due to this state of bewilderment, a woman begins to seek answers in the hopes of mending the confused state of mind related to her gender roles. Immersion- Emersion is the third phase where a woman begins to take a feminists stance and begins to develop her own ideas of womanhood. During stage three, relationships with other woman begin to grow strong while the attitude towards men becomes hostile. The last stage, internalization, is the moment when a woman defines her female identity without faulting on either of the traditional roles or strong feminists viewpoints. Similar to the racial identity models that are designed in a stage-like form, a female may not necessarily go through all stages in a linear fashion.
While this model is intended to be a Female Identity Model, it is important to recognize (for this research study) that woman of color and White woman may share several similar experiences. However, female identity development is uniquely different between White women and women of color. This is as a result of the social order in which women of color fall in relation to White women. Whether viewed by white men or women, women of color are typically viewed as, “other” in both racial and gender terms, while White women are in the position of power and privilege in racial terms (Parks et al., 1996). As the womanist theory pertains to women of color, (particularly Black woman), a Black woman begins her female development from the position of depreciation by the dominant groups (Parks et al., 1996). According to Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha (2011), “being Black and a woman is often an intersecting of race and gender and there is a complexity of their dual identity status” (p. 531).

**Conclusion to Gender Considerations.** How a Black student perceives themselves in regards to their race and gender is a contributing factor to Black racial identity and possibly student involvement. Researchers heard many narratives from the minority students in regards to how people view themselves as it relates to their communities and their high schools. Much of the information garnered from those individuals would be deemed negative, resulting in an undesirable self-image leading to low expectations of postsecondary achievement. In knowing this, once Black female students arrive on a predominantly White campus, they may be in search of a safe space where they can be free of stereotypes, avoid the feeling of onliness, be uplifted and not put down, and feel a sense of belongingness and connectedness.

**Conclusion**

This literature review explored three streams of literature: 1.) Student Involvement; 2.) Black racial identity; 3.) Black female identity. These beliefs were explored individually in
order to understand each as separate entities. Each stream delves into a different section explored in this study. Institutions of higher education are responsible for supporting all students through their college journey, both inside and outside of the classroom. When students enter college, they already possess numerous identities they are trying to understand. It is crucial that higher education institutions, particularly PWIs, increase their awareness of how they can support the needs of their Black female undergraduate student population. In creating support services within the student involvement sector of higher education, it is important to understand the contributing factors a Black female undergraduate student considers when determining their student involvement within their campus environment.

The review of the literature confirms the importance of student involvement as a key to a student’s overall college success and completion. Higher education institutions, particularly PWIs, must make sure that there are student involvement opportunities that cater to all students in order to maintain (or increase) student retention rates. It is the goal of this research to understand the connection between racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students and their student involvement at PWIs. In order to achieve the goal of this research, it is vital to understand the lived experiences of Black female undergraduate students who attend PWIs. It is essential to comprehend how these students perceive their own racial identity and the value they place on student involvement in college as well as what they consider when determining their student involvement plans.

Chapter three, the methodology section, will examine the qualitative method of research that will be used to conduct this study. Furthermore, it will provide an overview of the data collection and storage processes, the description and overview of participants and research site, and how the researcher will ensure trust and protection of each participant.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students who attend predominately white institutions (PWI’s) and determine if their racial identity is linked to their college student involvement. The study was guided by the research questions below. According to Creswell (2012), the purpose statement and research questions are mentioned in order for the researcher to best learn from the each participant (Creswell, 2012). Research questions are defined as the specific terms that the researcher is seeking to answer throughout the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). While the research questions are what the researcher is seeking to answer through this study, it is important to recognize that the originally posed questions may evolve throughout the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Through interviewing participants and exploring themes that arise throughout the transcription and coding of each participant interview, new knowledge appeared that required the researcher to explore that area further.

How do Black female college students make sense of their student involvement at a PWI?

Sub-questions:

How do Black female college students racial identity influence their campus involvement at a PWI?

How do Black female college students pre-college experiences influence their college student involvement?
How do Black female college students perceive their racial identity as a student at a PWI?

How do Black female college students perceive the ways in which institutions have adapted to their needs?

How do Black female college student think institutions should adapt to their needs?

**Positionality Statement**

As a Black woman who assimilated in predominantly White environments, my privilege comes from the idea that I have the innate ability to easily socialize within predominantly White environments. While my living and school environments were situations where I was the, “only one” my parents were deliberate in ensuring I was associated with the Black community. They encouraged me to join organizations that frequently placed me in the same room with predominantly Black youth. This often removed me from my state of “onlyness” to a state of racial familiarity (Harper, Davis, Jones, McGowan, Ingram, Platt, 2011). Due to my ability to adapt to both types of environment, I developed into a “bridge builder.” Bridge builders are those who are accepted by both White and Black communities, often building connections between friends of different races and backgrounds (Hesse-Biber, Livingstone, Ramirez, Barko, Johnson, 2010). Here lies one of my skillsets as a Black college student attending a PWI. It seems as though my racial identity allowed for me to diversify my campus life experiences by being a member of the Black student union or joining an organization with no racial or cultural connection.

As I considered my own identities and how they may impact my research, I came to the understanding that my racial identity, my upper middle class predominantly White surrounding,
my gender (woman), and my PWI experience were the identities that were most relevant (as it
pertains to this study). These four facets of my overall identity placed me in a position of bias. It
is crucial that this research be approached with a complete understanding that each individual’s
racial identity development is different and that my experience of attending a PWI is only my
own. Where I stand (as far as my identity) impacted on how I approach my study. The biases,
prejudices, and personal connection to this research was important to recognize and own
throughout this process. Machi & McEvoy (2012) expressed that personal attachment to an
interest provides a passion and dedication necessary for conducting good research, which is an
advantage. Unfortunately, personal attachment can also carry bias and opinions causing
researchers to jump to premature conclusions (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). Based off my own
racial identity journey and lived experiences, there was most certainly a personal attachment
towards my research topic. The personal attachment was the motivation for my research that
gave me the passion and drive to pursue this research topic. Having a true understanding of how
my personal attachment could have created biases and opinions as I conducted my research was
important. Ensuring that I remained objective throughout the entire research process was critical
towards the gathering of accurate information and data.

While the experiences of Black students who attend PWIs are not all the same, I believe
my research identity was that of the indigenous-insider perspective. According to Banks (2007),
the definition of an indigenous-insider is, “an individual who endorses the unique values,
perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture
and it’s perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can
speak with authority about it” (p.61). As a Black woman who has pursued all of her education at
PWIs, my experiences place me within the category of a legitimate part of the community of past
and current Black students who attended (or currently attend) a PWI. Carlton-Parsons (2008) explained, “in research, the positionalities of researchers and the research are pertinent” (p.1129). It is necessary to refrain from your presuppositions and passion having a negative impact on your overall research. Throughout the research process, it was important to recognize positionality as it relates to one’s topic. Having a solid understanding of your positionality provides the researcher with the ability to create a, “checks and balances” system. The checks and balances system serves as a tool to help the researcher recognize when their positionality is impacting their research.

**Research Design**

The definition of qualitative research is, “understanding human beings richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences” (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007, p. 24). Creswell (2012) states, “qualitative research collects data based on the words from a small number of individuals so that the participant’s views are obtained” (p. 16). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), “qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials such as life stories, interviews, cultural texts, etc.” (p. 4). Rubin and Rubin (2005) state, “qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied” (p. 15). One of the goals of qualitative research is to seek depth rather than breadth and obtain information about a smaller group of people (Ambert, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). Qualitative researchers seek to answer the “what” and the “how” question of a particular subject matter (Wertz, Chamaz, McMullen, Josselen, Anderson, & McSpadden, 2011). Qualitative research tends to rely on the views of the research participants and not always on the direction identified in the literature by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). As a qualitative researcher, one depends on the participant to provide comprehensive responses to questions
about how they constructed or understood their experience (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Prior to beginning a study, a qualitative researcher first outlines the topic, the description of the problem, and the purpose and scope of the research (Wertz et al., 2011). Qualitative researchers seek to listen to and analyze the words of the participants in order to develop a larger meaning and understanding of what the participants of the study are saying.

While qualitative research is a respectable form of research, there are criticisms and concerns that have been expressed. According Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative researchers are considered to be unscientific and are only explanatory or subjective. Qualitative researchers have been regarded as, “writing fiction not science, and do not have any way of verifying their statements” (p.2). Creswell (2012) mentions that the researcher analyzes the data for description and themes by interpreting the larger meaning of the findings from the individual stories. This has be criticized by many because a person’s interpretation of data may be skewed if the researcher deciphers the data in such a way that confirms their study verses how the data reads. Despite the criticisms of qualitative research, the objective of qualitative research is to understand and make meaning of the lived experiences of the research participants.

Research Tradition

The qualitative method of research that was used to conduct this study was narrative inquiry. Narratives in regards to qualitative research are defined as non-fictional personal stories about matters relevant to the study and they serve the purpose of providing the researcher with rich portrayal of human experiences, relationships, needs, feelings, values, and plans set within a distinctive context (Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics, 2011). Creswell (2012), Chase (2011), and Gola (2009) were in agreement that there is an ordering of experiences in narrative inquiry. There is a chronology of the experiences told by the participants. Connelly & Clandinin (1990),
Ruthellen (2001), Holley & Colyar (2009) and Elbaz-Luwisch (2010), stress the importance of detailed and rich narratives shared by the participants. These researchers consider humans as organisms leading complex lives and their experiences represent how they make meaning of their existence.

Although narrative inquiry tends to focus on the storytelling aspect of retrieving data, it is important to acknowledge the fact that this method of research goes beyond simply listening to a story. Narrative inquiry also records the doings, actions, and happenings which are known as the narrative expressions of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011). Narrative inquirers go beyond focusing on the vocal aspects of the narratives and center their attention on the content of the narration (what’s being told), the structure of the narration (the re-telling of the story), as well what is not being said vocally (Ruthellen, 2011).

Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the use of participant storytelling. The narrative researcher has the responsibility to listen to the individual stories of participants, accurately interpret the stories, and relay findings based on those stories. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2011), “narrative inquirers must develop intimacy within the researcher/participant relationship which can also contribute to building trustworthiness within the relationship” (p. 78). The position of the researcher is to listen to participant stories, “with an eye of identifying new possibilities within that experience” (Chase, 2011, p. 421). In narrative research, the researcher is considered to be the key component and there is a required relationship that develops between the researcher and participants that must be nurtured in order to truthfully retell their stories (Creswell, 2012). The researcher and participant work together to make meaning of the experiences shared through the narratives.
The goal is to make sense of a narrators or participants personal experience as it relates to the research questions. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described the role of the narrative researchers as the person who collects the stories of the lived experiences of the participants and retells their stories. Once the stories are told, the researcher serves as the storyteller, and with the most accuracy, interprets the stories of the individual without “writing over” their stories.

Similar to how there are criticisms of qualitative research, narrative inquiry has its own set of criticisms as a data collection method. Concerns related to the issues of research relationship, ethics, interpretation, and validity are foremost (Chase, 2011). According to Chase (2011), “narrative researchers often publish or perform longer stories from individual narratives and this can at times increase ethical issues that participants will feel vulnerable or exposed by the work of the narrative” (p. 424). The researcher’s interpretation of the stories is inclusive of their own thoughts about how they interpret the story to be verses the full actuality of the. Clandinin and Connelly (2011) indicated that the peculiarity between fact and fiction is often muddled due to the fact that interpretations of the narratives can be influenced by the researcher’s own thoughts. This is where trustworthiness becomes critical. Elbaz-Luwisch (2010) indicated, “trustworthiness of narrative inquiry centers on the complex matters of truth-value and the validity of findings” (p. 274). In other words, researcher maturity must be developed as to allow for accurate interpretations and portrayals of a participant’s story. In addition, it must hold true to retellings of the participant’s story and not retelling a researcher-influenced narrative. Another questionable aspect of narrative inquiry is the “Hollywood plot” scenario. This is defined as a plot in which everything works out well or to the researcher’s advantage (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011). The “Hollywood plot” can be a result of misinterpretation of the stories being told making this a major concern of narrative inquiry.
The objective of a narrative researcher is to make meaning of one’s story. A narrative researcher strives to make sense of one’s lived experiences by focusing not only on the story being told but how the story is being told, the linguistics practices that are consumed while the participant is storytelling, and the emotions of the participant while telling the story. In narrative inquiry, the researcher is the listener. Practicing the art of listening becomes the essential role of the researcher. As mentioned by Chase (2011), “the narrative researcher listens first to the voices within each narrative” (p. 424). The role of a narrative inquirer is to attend to the stories of participants and interpret their power in order to make meaning of the story. The art of listening to one’s narrative is not only with the ears but also requires observation of non-verbal communication, noting omissions, and understanding context. A narrative researcher does not simply retell a participant’s story but rather analyzes the narratives in order to answer the research questions.

**Recruitment and Access**

Recruitment of participants was a crucial aspect to this study. Without participants, there is no study. While this study required the recruitment of a small number of participant’s, (three to five), having a strategic outline of the recruitment process led to organized recruiting. Before a researcher can proceed with recruiting participants for their study, they needed to seek approval from the institutions Institution Review Board (IRB). The purpose of the IRB is to protect human research subjects and evaluate the research to ensure it is aligned with the ethical and regulatory guidelines previously described (Hart & Belotto, 2010).

The researcher connected with the Director of Student Development who served as the gatekeeper towards communicating with students that were eligible for this study. Requesting a face-to-face opportunity to share information about the study was of equal importance. It was
critical to provide information about the study to the department of student affairs of the institution in order to make the department aware of the research and the desire to connect with students on the campus. Due to the fact that the Director of Student Development had several potential participants in mind, it was unnecessary to go through the Office of Student Activities at the school. By having the support of the Department of Student Affairs, (specifically the Director of Student Development), the researcher was provided additional guidance and assistance with the recruiting efforts of this study. Had this not been the case, recruitment efforts would have required the researcher to be purposeful in determining which campus organizations and departments to seek out. Since the Director of Student Development was aware of several students who would be interested in participating in the study, connecting with campus organizations became unwarranted. In the appendix section, there was an email included that would have been used to send to student organization leaders however due to the fact that the first email going out to the Director of Student Development, this person was able to directly connect the researcher to participants for the study. From there, the researcher utilized the participant emails in the appendixes to further conduct the research process. Participants for this study were selected based on their self-identification as Black, female, currently enrolled as an undergraduate junior or senior (academic credit-wise), and who were presently active in one or more campus organization(s) that were registered with the institutions student activities office.

Research Site

Due to the fact that the study focused on Black female undergraduate students who attended a PWI, as well as student involvement, the setting in which student involvement is prevalent within the college campus culture was critical to this research. The site in which this research was conducted was a four year public university located in a rural setting within the
Southwest region of the United States. For the sake of this study the name of this institution will be titled Southwest University. The institution had a student activities office and the student involvement amongst the student body was a valued aspect to the institution. The institution was classified as a PWI where the White student population was the majority while the student of color population served as the minority group on the campus.

Participants

The qualitative research study consisted of three participants who identified as Black or Bi-racial (with one of the racial identities being Black) females. Mason (2010) shared three reasons for utilizing a smaller sample size in qualitative research: 1) Frequencies are not as important because more data does not necessarily lead to more information; 2) Qualitative research is more concerned with making meaning verses generalizing hypothesized statements; 3) Qualitative research is very labor intensive and analyzing a large sample can be time consuming and often impractical (p.1). Each participant was a full time undergraduate student who was a junior or senior, (based on the number of academic credits earned) and was currently active in campus clubs, organizations, or associations (excluding division athletics). Transfer students were eligible for this study, as long as they had been a student at the research site for one year or more. Participants for this study were selected based on their self-identification of the previously stated participant criteria. The process of selecting the sample of participants holds an element of extreme significance within conducting a study and the sample section can have a profound impact on the quality of the research (Coyne, 1997).

The sampling method that was utilized for this study was that of criterion, convenient, and snowball sampling if the initial outreach did not get the number participants required. Criterion sampling is a form of sampling most widely used in qualitative research. In this form
of sampling, the researcher uses specific criteria based on the questions guiding the research (Morrow, 2005). For example, within this research the participant criteria was an undergraduate student, attending a PWI, who identifies as a Black female considered to be a junior or senior academic credit-wise. Convenient sampling is when the researcher selects the most accessible subjects (Marshall, 1996). Typically in this form of sampling, the first available data source is used for the research. Snowball sampling is considered to be another commonly used sampling method in qualitative research (Noy, 2008). In snowball sampling, the researcher retrieves potential participants through contact information that is provided by the participants (Noy, 2008). According to Woodley and Lockard (2016), researched participants within the sample are asked by the researcher to identify other possible participants (Woodley & Lockard, 2016). The participant selection of a qualitative research sample often has overpowering effect on the overall quality of the study (Coyne, 1997).

**Data Collection**

The data collected utilized the qualitative method of narrative inquiry. In narrative inquiry many researchers use in-depth interviewing to gather narrative data (Chase, 2011). Each participant was interviewed in person by means of a semi-structured interview process. Each participant was initially interviewed twice and analysis of the first two interviews determined the need of any follow-up interviews for further information or clarity purposes. Each interview lasted between 45 – 90 minutes. The objective of the first interview was to serve as an introductory interview that focused on the life history of the participants and their perceptions of their racial and gender identity, as well as their identity as a whole. For example, this interview sought to explore their pre-college experiences. The second interview delved deeper into their identities and concentrated on their student involvement experiences at the
institution. This interview sought to discover their role within their student involvement and how they went about selecting their areas of student involvement. The idea behind conducting two interviews was to develop an understanding of each individuals past experiences in order to comprehend how those experiences impacted their current experiences.

In order to devise a productive narrative study, it was crucial to have a noble and respectable working relationship between the researcher and participants. In narrative inquiry, field text/notes are a way of collecting data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Field text/notes allow for continued growth and change throughout the study. Participant’s field text/notes were shared with them in order to ensure accuracy of the participant stories.

**Data Storage**

Each participant’s interview was audio-recorded utilizing recording app (Rev Voice Recorder) via the researcher’s I-phone and the sound recorder from the Microsoft surface of the researcher. The I-phone and Microsoft recording devices were password protected and could only be accessed by the researcher. Upon completing the interviews, each interview was transcribed and the transcribed data was saved on an external hard drive, as well as within Google docs. Printed copies of the transcriptions were secured in a lock box. Once the study and the dissertation are completed, defended and passed, all recorded materials, transcriptions, and field notes will be archived into a secured space. In addition to audio recordings and transcriptions being safely protected, and mode of participant communication, such as email address or cell phone numbers will be erased from all devices once the researcher defends and passes their dissertation defense.
The participants received pseudonyms in order to protect their identity and to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process. Pseudonyms serve as a replacement of actual participant’s names (Saldana, 2016). Other identifiers that were used to describe the participants included: their academic year, major, clubs and organizations in which they were involved and other basic general identifiers related to the person as a student. The name of the participant’s institution was not disclosed.

**Data Analysis**

The analyzing of data typically occurs in two phases. The first phase is preparing transcripts. In this phase the researcher finds, refines, and elaborates on concepts, themes, and events (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The second phase is the coding phase where the researcher codes the interviews in order to identify themes and concepts across each participants interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Ruthellen (2011) described how analyzing data in a narrative inquiry study is achieved in two ways: holistic analysis and categorical analysis. Holistic analysis is when the whole story and sections of the story are interpreted with respect to other parts. The purpose of categorical analysis is to extract sections or words belonging to a category. The researcher used coding strategies and compared the codes to similar text from other narratives. Creswell (2012) explains that upon completing the transcription of the stories the researcher codes the data into themes of categories. The purpose of the themes is to provide complexity of a narrative and it adds depth to the understanding of the experiences shared through the participant’s storytelling. Creswell (2012) explains the analysis the data in a narrative inquiry establishes the process of re-storying: when the researcher presents a sequential order and a causal link among ideas. According Rubin and Rubin (2005), the intent of analyzing narrative
data is to discover variation, portray shades of meaning, and examine complexity (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

**Coding the data.** The coding process helps the researcher to study different themes and concepts that emerge through the narratives of the participants. Coding is defined as, “systematically labeling and linking concepts, themes, events, and topical markers so that you can readily retrieve and examine all of the data units that refer to the same subject across all of the interviews” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 207). The coding process occurs in multiple stages. Before the first phase of coding begins, pre-coding is a valuable process to consider in qualitative research. Pre-coding is a procedure that involves circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant’s quotes or passages that catch the attention of the researcher (Saldana, 2016). Once the pre-coding of each narrative is completed, the researcher progresses towards the next phase of coding. In the case of this study, the researcher began the first phase of coding by utilizing initial coding also known as, “open coding”. Initial coding is a form of coding the breaks down a narrative into distinct sections, the researcher closely studies them, and compares the sections for similarities and differences (Saldana, 2016). This type of coding allows for the researcher to remain open to every possibility of theoretical directions evoked by the researcher’s interpretations of the narratives (Saldana, 2016). Utilizing the initial coding process provided a starting point for further exploration and analyzing of the data, allowing the researcher to gain a sense of direction in the coding process. The initial coding allows for digesting and reflecting of the data before proceeding with the next phase of coding the data (Saldana, 2016).

In the next phase of coding data, the researcher looked for relationships between the codes and participants. The coding method used for the second round of coding will be pattern
coding. According to Saldana (2016), pattern coding is, “a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, or concepts” (p.236). Pattern coding is a way of identifying emerging themes, configuration, or an explanation of the data collected through the narratives of the participants (Saldana, 2016). Pattern coding is a way of pulling together, sorting, and analyzing the material from the first cycle of coding.

**Trustworthiness**

Building trust between the researcher and participant was crucial to qualitative research, particularly narrative inquiry. The narrative inquiry process requires the act of collaboration between the researcher and participant and the narrative inquirer must actively involve the participant in the inquiry as it unfolds (Creswell, 2012). For example, the researcher may provide the participant with a copy of their transcribed interview in order to allow for the participant to elaborate or provide clarity on different aspects of what they may have said during the interview. An additional aspect of developing a trustworthy relationship is that the researcher must take the initiative to join the narrative or become part of the landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The researcher must be a sensitive reader of and questioner of the narratives and any situations that may arise throughout the storytelling process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The researcher must develop a sense of openness throughout the data collection process because openness helps the participant feel more protected, less exposed, and helps to build empathy (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As stated in the positionality section, it was important as a researcher to recognize the biases they may have brought to the study. Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated, “rather than pretend to not have any biases, examine your preconceptions and work out how your feelings may slant the research” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 82).
Trustworthiness in qualitative research is developed in establishing oneself as a researcher in four ways: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and triangulation (Morrow, 2005). Establishing your credibility as a researcher is achieved by persistence within field observation and being an engage researcher with the participants of the study (Morrow, 2005). Researcher dependability refers to the way in which the study is conducted (Morrow, 2005). There should be a sense of constancy throughout the data collection and analysis. The researcher should conduct all participant experiences equally. This does not necessarily mean follow-up and probe questions will be the same, but how the research is conducted should be uniform. Morrow (2005) mentions confirmability, which means that the findings of the study should represent the topic being researched rather than the belief of biases of the researchers (Morrow, 2005). This also relates to the adequacy of data analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings, which alludes to the fact that the researchers should immerse themselves into the data and understand that this is an interactive process that may lead the researchers back into the field for further information (Morrow, 2005). The researcher/participant relationship does not end with the interview but rather it continues, allowing participants to be part of the whole process rather than part of the process.

Lastly, triangulation refers to capturing and respecting multiple perspectives as crucial components of quality (Morrow, 2005). Each participant is equally important to the study and the researchers should not diminish the value of any information in which each participant provides. Ensuring that the participant knows their value in the research space adds to the formulation of trust within the researcher/participant relationship. Documenting the data collection and analysis of the research should be thoroughly documented to allow readers to follow the research process so that the researcher’s methods could not be questioned.
Understanding the value of developing a trustworthy research setting helps in the retrieving of rich and in-depth data from the narratives of the participants. It was key to ensure that participants were involved in all aspects of the study beyond simply sharing their lived experiences. In order to have trust in the process, the researcher engaged each participant in member checking of their transcribed interviews in order ensure accuracy of the story they have told (Creswell, 2012). The researcher also provided the opportunity to share field notes of their interview in order to ensure accuracy of the interpretations of their story. Lastly, even though the data analysis process may be the sole responsibility of the researcher, sharing and explaining the coding methods of the transcriptions allowed for the research process to not end abruptly. Suddenly ending the data collection process can sometimes leave the participant feeling neglected in the process. Providing the continuity of participant involvement allowed for participants to feel as if their story is protected and appropriately interpreted and shared.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Protecting the human subject is considered to be a mandate within social science. In conducting qualitative research, all participants must receive the utmost respect. Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden (2001) discuss how autonomy, justice, and beneficence are three ethical principles to consider when pursuing qualitative research. Providing consent forms provides a sense of autonomy, “allowing each participant to exercise their rights autonomous persons to voluntarily accept or refuse to participate in the study” (p. 95). The purpose of providing consent forms to each participant was to make a reasonable balance between over-informing and under-informing during any part of the study. Beneficence refers to, “doing good” for others and preventing harm. The third principal of justice, refers to equal share, fairness and avoiding exploitation and abuse of participants (Orb et al., 2001). Incorporating each of these ethics, as
well as complying with the IRB standards and information provided within the consent form, ensured that each participant was protected throughout the study. Before beginning the data collection, the researcher reviewed the participant consent form that was signed prior to beginning the data collection process. Reviewing the participant consent form provided awareness of the study and indicated to the participant that they had the right to withdrawal from this study at any time.

The researcher must be aware of any breach of protection, as this could severely impact the study. The researcher maintained confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms, utilized a secured filing system with the audio taping of the interviews, the hard copy of transcriptions, and the consent forms (as those will have the actual names of the participants). As previously stated, the study was approved by the IRB as an additional layer of human protection for the participants of this study.

**Conclusion**

This study examined racial identity amongst Black, female, undergraduate students and how their racial identity were linked to student involvement at a PWI. Narrative inquiry was the qualitative research method used; allowing participants to share their stories, provided a voice, and made sense of the participants lived experiences as it related to the proposed research questions. The data was collected and analyzed through the initial coding and pre-coding, open coding, and pattern coding methods. The member checking process, discussed in the trustworthiness section, was used to check for accuracy of the transcribed data and the coding and analyzing of the data. Member checking was also a tactic used to ensure researcher biases were not interfering with the analyzing of data.
The purpose of this study was to capture how Black female undergraduate college students who attend PWIs made sense of their student involvement, particularly as it pertained to their racial identity. By providing the opportunity for participants to have a voice and share their lived experiences, this population of college students now had a voice in this area of research.
Chapter Four: Narratives and Findings

Three participants volunteered to share their lived experiences as it related to the research topic. The three participants comprised of one junior and two seniors attending a predominantly White institution in the southwest region of the United States. Two out of the three participants identified as Black/African-American women (Danielle and Gabrielle) and one of the participants identified as a biracial (White/Caucasian and Black/African-American) woman (Jade).

Three areas of focus were present throughout the interview questions: being Black; being a Black woman; Black racial identity and how it impacted student involvement at a PWI. The first area discussed in each of the narratives was how each participant defined their Black racial identity. It focused on how each of the participants thought through their Black racial identity development and what it meant to be a Black person. Within this area, the participants discussed their racial awareness, their journey towards understanding their Black racial identity, and how that impacted their entire being.

The next area of focus that was highlighted throughout each of the participant interviews was explaining what it meant to be a Black woman. This focal point concentrated on the intersectionality of being Black and being a woman; combining these two entities of one’s identity, race and gender. This area focused on what it meant to be a woman then narrowing to what it meant to be a Black woman.

Racial identity and how it impacted student involvement at a PWI was the final focus area of the interviews. It further elaborated on the participant’s racial identity development while integrating into the discussion: pre-college extracurricular activities and college student
involvement. This area explored and answered the main research question proposed, while the other focus areas provided background information for the sub-questions of the research. The research question and sub-questions for this research study were as follows:

How do Black female college students make sense of their student involvement at a PWI?

Sub-questions:

How do Black female college students racial identity influence their campus involvement at a PWI?

How do Black female college students pre-college experiences influence their college student involvement?

How do Black female college students perceive their racial identity as a student at a PWI?

How do Black female college students perceive the ways in which institutions have adapted to their needs?

How do Black female college student think institutions should adapt to their needs?

The participants eagerly shared their lived experiences in relation to this study. The narratives of each participant showcased a variety of different components related to their pre-college experiences and extracurricular involvement as it connected with their Black racial identity development. The narratives also described their college experiences related to Black racial identity, female gender identity, and college student involvement. The purpose of this chapter is to share the narratives of the lived experiences of Danielle, Gabrielle, and Jade. This
chapter discusses some of the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the narratives of these three participants.

**Danielle’s Story**

*To be Black is to be beautiful, unique, misunderstood, misrepresented, and underestimated.*

*Danielle*

**Being Black and being a Black woman.** Danielle, who identified as a Black/African-American woman, was not always proud of her racial identity. In her formative years, she spent much of her time feeling a sense of shame about being Black:

I remember being a child and putting my grandmother’s slip on my head so that my hair would be longer because I was associating long, straight hair with beauty. My hair was a kinkier texture and many of my cousins came from a Native American background which resulted in many of my cousins having much straighter hair than me.

She was often considered the cousin with the “bad hair.” This “bad hair” title morphed into the belief that she was inadequate, causing her to feel an extreme need to measure up to a certain standard. Danielle recalled having a lot of misplaced self-identity and much of this had to do with what she experienced as a young child. In middle school, she developed internal insecurities and complexes as she began to explore relationships and develop an attraction towards White males. During this time, she attended a predominantly White school and lived in a predominantly White town.

At this age it seemed as though White males were not attracted to me and I initially thought it was because I was Black. Maybe White aesthetic was better because White females have longer hair or they are skinnier or they have prettier eyes.
This was the time when Danielle became aware of the fact that her Blackness could cause her to not be seen as beautiful or considered equal to her White female counterparts. Her internal insecurities and complexes developed with the thought pattern that White aesthetic was better. With these newly developed insecurities and complexes, she made it a point to make sure no one ever thought she sounded “too Black” due to the fact that her skin color was already Black. This caused her to separate from Black identity altogether.

While she was trying her best to separate herself from her Black racial identity, she was slowly realizing that it was impossible for her to fit into her surroundings, leading her to encircle herself with a group of alternative White people which were White people who were into punk rock music and dressed in the more gothic clothing style. Her White counterparts often referred to her as “not really Black”. Danielle truly embraced that phrase, as if it were a compliment or achievement. She remembered the feelings of being so misunderstood and she said that she began to “reject myself before anyone could reject me.” Danielle expressed “this idea of making myself feel as if it didn’t truly matter to her whether or not I was able to fit in.” According to Danielle, by rejecting herself before others rejected her, it taught her how to be on her own. In her formative years, she was so assimilated into White culture that even her family often remind her “she just became Black a few years ago.”

**Being Black and being a Black woman…and Now.** As Danielle considered what it meant to be Black in regards to the current state of her Black racial identity, many definitions arose.

My definition of what it means to be Black now is to be beautiful, unique, misunderstood, misrepresented, and underestimated. I think the first thing that comes to mind is my skin color because that is the first racial signifier. The second thing that
comes to mind is my hair. From my own personal perspective, intelligence, resilience, initiative, and compassion are wrapped in my identity as a Black woman.

Danielle described being Black as feeling a sense of marginalization or the idea that one was being put into a box, contending that a Black person struggles when others have a certain idea of who a person may be based on their appearance. “Therefore, I, as a Black person may do something to prove otherwise.”

Danielle spoke about the art of articulation and what it meant in relation to being a Black person. She often noticed that when she began to speak, White people would take her more seriously. She assumed that her White counterparts viewed her as articulate. Danielle’s definition of articulate means, “to speak proper English which meant that you spoke in a way that is considered normal especially in predominantly White spaces.” Danielle considered other aspects that coincide with Black culture such as music, dancing, religion/spirituality, and creativity.

From Danielle’s perspective, being a woman felt like just as much a burden as being a Black person.

To be a woman requires the constant need to prove yourself and to sometimes minimize yourself. To be a woman means that there are the “supposed to be’s” and the “should do’s”.

Danielle believes that the, “supposed to be’s” included: treading carefully, second guessing yourself, and not taking the lead but rather being the person who would be found standing behind someone. Danielle defined the “should do’s” as “a woman should be apologetic, a woman should be subservient, and a woman should not speak her mind”. As Danielle explored her world of being a Black woman, she indicated that it was difficult. The difficulty stemmed from being
in a world where she could comfortably fit and feeling as though that world did not exist. She felt as though she did not fit into the feminist world and did not fit into the Black world. Danielle supposed that the intersectionality was hard and that sometimes as a Black woman, “I end up feeling like I don’t fit in anywhere”. Frequently, Danielle found herself questioning whether she was Black or female first.

As she reflected on her Black racial identity and the impact it had on her overall being, Danielle indicated that her racial identity was a major part of who she was as a person stating that “My Black racial identity is every fiber of my being”. Her Black racial identity was what she desired to put her life’s work and energy towards and it was what she advocated for.

**Being a Black woman at a PWI.** According to Danielle, “to be a Black woman on a predominantly White college campus can be interesting.” Danielle suggested that some days are harder than others:

I think the hardest moments are when I am having an interaction with a professor who may not understand their biases or prejudices. That is hard because I feel like that person is in a position of authority and they obviously are educated, which means they should be forward and critical thinkers.

At times, Danielle found her interactions with her White counterparts at her PWI to be a disappointment. At times, she found herself under the impression that she had developed some sort of friendship with a (White) person and then that same person would do something that undermined who she was and what she cared about.

**Pre-college extracurricular activities and college student involvement.** Prior to attending college, Danielle began to explore the world of sports, playing basketball and later
volleyball. She recalled spending one summer of her childhood attending a cultural camp sponsored by the cultural center within her surrounding neighborhood. Danielle explained that her extracurricular involvement was minimal but she did spend time working at her local gas station/convenient store. Not being able to find her fit within the group dynamics of the extracurricular activities that she was exploring led to her minimal extracurricular activity involvement prior to college. Working her part time job at her local convenient store is where Danielle established her social connectedness outside of academia.

Progressing into higher education, Danielle’s college student involvement was minimal but valued. Danielle focused her college student involvement efforts on what she was passionate about: social justice and diversity (Diversity Committee), as well as activities related to her major and future career (Student Broadcast Association). Being a part of the Diversity Committee allowed her to engage with students from a variety of backgrounds, including members of the LGBTQ community, students of color, and more. This committee served as a place where students could be honest about their thoughts and are met with understanding and compassion. Danielle stated, “Sometimes at PWIs students, particularly those who are passionate about diversity and social justice, are met with push back and criticism.” Danielle’s advisor was in charge of the Student Broadcast Association and encouraged her to join the organization.

Danielle defines college student involvement as what she does outside the classroom that takes actions on her values.

College student involvement focuses on inclusion, compassion, authenticity, and those aspects that are high within my personal values. Student involvement in college feeds the
issues that I am truly passionate about and allows me to share with other people and to build my network.

Danielle considered student involvement outside of the classroom important because it created a sense of community. The community created a network of people that had an understanding of the unique set of issues one may face. The classroom does not always provide this type of social support. She believed college students need to be involved, especially if they identified as a minority on a predominantly White campus. They have a community on campus in which they felt like they were understood and affirmed. Building the sense of community as a college student was important because that community was where one felt accepted and embraced where this was not always the case (speaking in regards to Black students attending a PWI).

**Racial identity and student involvement.** Racial identity played a significant role in her student involvement because her racial identity was important.

My racial identity allows me to act on my highest value and that is being completely myself. Sometimes I am prevented from being truly authentic in spaces in which I am the only Black person. While my racial identity is important when it comes to student involvement, it does not necessarily deter me from seeking out an organization, association, or committee.

Danielle explained that it was rare that she would go someplace and say, “There are no Black people here therefore I am not going to be a part of this.” That was her every day and she was accustomed to being the only Black person in the room.
Summary

Danielle’s Black racial identity journey was one that began with racial shamefulness yet evolved into racial pride. She discussed the struggles she faced regarding acceptance of her racial identity, battling to wholeheartedly accept herself as a Black woman while fully immersing herself into White culture. Danielle spent many years having a misguided or misplaced self-identity, often feeling misunderstood as she struggled to find some clarity within her racial identity.

As a Black woman attending a PWI, she described her overall experience as, “somedays are harder than others.” Her experiences with some of her professors forced her to wonder why the biases of some professors goes unrecognized. She believed that faculty members should have the ultimate maturity and critical thinking skills to recognize when their prejudices or biases are impacting the classroom. Unfortunately, she was often disappointed with the realization that this was not always the case.

As she considered her racial identity and how it affected her level of student involvement on campus, she indicated that while her Black racial identity played a significant role in her student involvement decision making, it was a rarity that it would deter her from being involved on campus.

Gabrielle’s Story

*I never stopped fighting. No matter what happened, I never stopped fighting.* Gabrielle

**Being Black and being a Black woman.** According to Gabrielle, the literal meaning, “to be Black” means to have African descent.
There are many aspects of my Black identity that comes mind when I think about what it means to Black. The first thing is my hair. My hair is a big part of my identity and my hair is not straight but rather it is of kinky texture.

Gabrielle placed a lot of value on her hair because it was hers and she loved all of her kinks and curls. According to Gabrielle, other aspects of Black identity could be summed up in two phases: the fight and the hustle. Personally, Gabrielle had never stopped fighting, regardless of the obstacle. She stated, “There is a strength amongst Black people that may not be seen across other cultures.” Gabrielle stated, “As Black people we are going to do what we need to do in order to get where we need to be.”

Gabrielle, who was raised in a predominantly Black neighborhood, discussed the many negative stereotypes that come with being Black. For example, Gabrielle talked about the automatic assumption that Black people lacked intelligence or, in other words, are stupid. In a college classroom setting, she experienced the feeling as though an entire class assumed she was stupid because she was Black. She assumed that this may have stemmed from the way she spoke or the fact that she did not speak the way her White counterparts did. Gabrielle describes the phrase “speak the way they do” as the proper way or utilizing fancy terms.

As far as her sense of self, Gabrielle chose to not always worry about race until it became a concern. Her awareness of her Black racial identity emerged when she entered high school. She realized that there was a difference and that was when she began to see color. Prior to her racial awareness, her life was fun and it was not awkward or confusing but rather everyone was just present regardless of their race. She remembered going to the park and not caring about whether someone was Black or White; she merely wanted to be friends with everyone. To her, it did not matter whether or not a person had a darker or lighter skin tone. In the present day, while
Gabrielle tried her best to not be judgmental, there was always that slight hesitation when she interacted with a White person. Gabrielle realized that the world was not as nice or happy as her mother portrayed. Often, Gabrielle’s mother sheltered her from the world’s racial tensions.

**Being a woman and being a Black woman.** According to Gabrielle, to be a woman simply meant that you were just a female and that the body parts were different from a male. At times, Gabrielle did not like being a woman due to the societal perceived notions of how a woman should carry herself.

I believe that some people may presume a woman to be fragile, full of emotions, and vulnerable but a woman does not have to be all of that in order to be a woman. I make a conscious effort to be strong minded.

Gabrielle stated, “As a woman we learn how to use things that are around us to make the world go round, but as a Black woman we learn how to use everything around us to make the world go around and make things work.” According to Gabrielle, to be a Black woman meant double the strength and it meant being resourceful.

**Pre-college extracurricular activities and college student involvement.** Prior to attending college, Gabrielle was involved in Poetry club, she was the manager of her high school’s track team, a member of Spanish club, ROTC, African American society, theatre, and Upward Bound (a college readiness program). Gabrielle kept herself busy through an abundance of extracurricular activities that were predominantly school affiliated and culturally based. Once Gabrielle entered college, she took it upon herself to explore a variety of involvement opportunities, involving herself in some while others were not a good match. These student involvement opportunities included: Criminal Justice Society, Student Government Association,
Spanish Club, and Baptist Collegiate Ministry. While none of these organizations were long term commitments for Gabrielle, she did spend a significant amount of time seeking out the organization in order to determine if they were a right fit for student involvement needs.

Gabrielle is not involved in many of the traditional student involvement opportunities, however she does work for the Department of Residential Life. The reason for this stemmed from her constant interactions with people, even when she was not “on the clock.” While she may not be involved in an abundance of campus organizations or clubs, she does make an effort to seek out activities and/or events where she could become a participant. According to Gabrielle, college students are supposed to be involved.

College involvement is finding something to involve yourself in outside of simply attending class everyday. Finding interests and something to do that supports those interests.

**Racial identity and student involvement.** Gabrielle indicated that her racial identity absolutely had an impact on her student involvement in college. She shared an experience of her first student involvement attempt at her predominantly White institution.

I took it upon myself to explore the Criminal Justice Society as one of my professors was the advisor. Prior to walking into my first welcome meeting for the organization, I asked my professor a question in a very serious manner, “Are there any Black people in this meeting?” My advisor was surprised at the question but answered ever so hesitantly, there is one.

Due to the fact that there was at least one other Black person present, Gabrielle felt motivated to walk into the meeting. As her college years progressed, she became more comfortable with
asking the question, “Are there any Black people involved in this organization?” Gabrielle concluded that if an organization was unable to confirm the involvement of Black people within the organization, there was little chance that she would consider joining.

Gabrielle believed that the lack of campus diversity at her PWI made the campus uncomfortable for her. In her opinion, the campus needed to become more inclusive. Gabrielle believed that the simplicity of creating a friendly atmosphere was a starting point and could go farther. In Gabrielle’s opinion, there was a lack of college student involvement amongst the Black student population on campus and that could be because the institution’s population was mostly White. Gabrielle believed that the reason many Black students chose not participate was because they might find themselves to be the only Black person in an organization of White people. According to Gabrielle, this became the underlying reason for the discomfort amongst Black student involvement at Gabrielle’s PWI.

Summary

Race had not been a major concern for Gabrielle during her foundational years. However, during high school, she became aware that she was a Black woman. As explained in her narrative, before recognizing her racial being, life was worriless (as it pertained to race). There was never a hesitancy to engage with anyone, regardless of their identity. However, since the heightened awareness of her own racial identity, knowing who was around her intensified as well. As a result, she had developed a sense of caution when involving herself with other people (particularly her White counterparts).

As a Black woman attending a PWI, her racial identity strongly impacted her student involvement choices. Her Black racial identity had such an intense impact on how she chose to
be involved that she often posed the question of Black student involvement before determining whether an organization or club was worth her time. The answer to this question often became the determining factor as to whether an organization was worth her time, as Gabrielle did not want to deal with the possibility of being the “only one” [Black person] in the room. She explained that this could be the reason as to why her student involvement membership was minimal.

**Jade’s Story**

*I feel like I am automatically the one that is supposed to give the answer for all Black people.*

_Jade_

**Being Black.** Jade was a bi-racial woman who identified as both White/Caucasian and Black/African-American. When asked, “what does it mean to be Black?” she answered that this was an area of her identity in which she had been struggling and had been trying to understand herself as a bi-racial woman. In order to grapple with her Black racial identity, she took it upon herself to research racial identity development and mentioned a book titled, “Why Are the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” by Beverly Tatum. Jade recently decided to return to her natural hair for the first time since the age of seven (she is 23). With the transition of her hair, she slowly adopted different practices that may be more associated with Black identity. When she contemplated her Black racial identity, her idea of body image came to mind. For most of her life, Jade tried to meet the societal Whiteness standards of beauty but realized that she had curves and that she should embrace that aspect of her Black racial identity. From a very young age, she was considered to be different from her peers.
I remembered a time during my elementary education when I was taking a standardized test and was left with the option of selecting my racial demographic as White or Black but never both. As I pondered, I distinctly remembered selecting White because this is what I knew, this was who I was surrounded by within my family and outside of my family environment. For the majority of my youth I identified mostly with my White racial identity and therefore it was simple for me to indicate my race as White. It was my teacher, at that time, who came up to me and said, no Jade you are Black…you have to pick Black.

Jade remembered being extremely frustrated not because she wanted to be 100% White but because she could never only be one race when she was bi-racial, indicating that she was two races.

Jade recalled childhood moments regarding her hair, the other children making statements, “Oh your hair is so different…Why is your hair like that?” She spoke about the other (White) children thinking it was okay to touch her hair as if she was an animal at a petting zoo. As a result of this vexation of children treating her hair as this absurd fascination, she relaxed (chemically straightened) her hair at the early age of seven. Jade was already the “different” child based off her skin color and decided her hair would not be different as well.

Due to the stage that Jade was in regarding her Black racial identity development, she felt as though race was extremely important to her. She had explored her Black racial identity in relation to Cross’s Nigrescence Theory (1971, 1991) and believed that she was partially in the Immersion – Emersion stage. As discussed earlier, this is the stage in which an individual has the desire to submerge themselves with everything pertaining to their race and typically avoids
Whiteness all together. She did believe that once she had a complete understanding of bi-
racialism she would be better able to integrate the two aspects of her racial identity.

**Being a Black woman and being a Black woman at a PWI.** As a woman who was in
pursuit of her education, Jade felt she would be empowered to teach people. Despite this belief, there were obstacles in place that were against her as a woman.

To be a Black woman is kind of a double whammy as if you have two things that you have to stand up for and that there are two reasons as to why you have to work twice as hard.

As she pondered her experience as a Black woman in the classroom, she had always been afraid to answer any questions in class, typically because she had been the only Black person and never wanted the possibility of answering a question incorrectly and having others make the assumption that her Black racial background impacted her intelligence. The possibility of comments being made such as, “She is a Black person” or “She is the stupid Black girl” kept her silent. While this fear was still deep-seeded, she was moving toward the point where she was trying to exercise her voice and understands that when she was wrong it was okay.

As previously mentioned, Jade spent much of her schooling in predominantly White institutions of learning.

Attending a predominantly White institution, I often feel as if I am automatically the one that is supposed to give the answer for all Black people. I am supposed to know what it is like as if I am the example for the Black experience.
Often, she felt as though all eyes were on her, sometimes resulting in nervousness. It made her feel like people were stereotyping because if a person was going to accept her answer as the answer for all Black people then her White counterparts were not getting the bigger picture.

Before Jade’s Black racial identity became more salient to her, she simply lived and she did not necessarily see everything for what it was. Now, she could better understand issues with regard to racial identity and the history of how she arrived at this point of her life.

**Pre-college extracurricular activities and college student involvement.** Prior to college, Jade was involved in a few school-based extracurricular activities, including cheerleading, the Gifted and Talented program, the National Honor Society, and Spanish club.

Jade was a student who transferred twice within her college career. She began her freshman year of college at a branch campus of another institution located in the southern region of the state. From there, she returned back to the northern part of the state and attended a branch campus of Southwest University. Unfortunately, the branch campus did not offer many college student involvement opportunities and that was the piece of the college experience that was missing for her. Once she transferred to the main campus, Jade became involved in Psi Chi (psychology organization), Community Counseling and Psychology Student Association (CCPSA), and the Diversity Committee; she was heavily involved in all three of these student organizations. Prior to transferring to the branch and main campus of Southwest University, she was a member of a sorority which was predominantly White. Jade pursuit towards joining a predominantly White sorority was prompted by her desire to fulfill this need to be involved. Two young ladies, who were in one of her class as the time, prompted her to join the sorority and go through the recruitment process. Jade was no longer an active member of this sorority. She explained that there was something within her that prompted her to decide that being a member
of this majority White sorority did not feel right for her. She could not officially determine if it had something to do with where she was with her Black racial identity development and being one of the only Black members of this sorority amongst a sisterhood of White women.

When Jade considered what it meant to be involved in college outside of the classroom, she defined it as something that a student attended on campus for networking purposes. Student involvement was important for many reasons and without student involvement, the college experience felt incomplete.

**Racial identity and student involvement.** Jade considered her Black racial identity and its potential impact on her student involvement. She believed that the two were connected. For example, both Psi Chi and CCPSA are somewhat diverse organizations. The current president of Psi Chi was a person of color as well as other students within the organization. She did feel that if these organizations were not as diverse as they were, she would feel that sense of anxiety she felt when she was the only Black person in the room. The Diversity Committee allowed her to become involved with an organization not affiliated with her major (psychology). While her racial identity may be a considering factor when joining an organization, she said it does not deter her from being involved in college. If there was a group of interest she wanted to join, she did so without hesitation.

**Summary**

Jade was a biracial student battling to understand her two racial identities. She examined her Black racial identity and explained that for much of her life, her Black racial identity was ignored. Raised in a predominantly White environment, she often neglected her Black racial identity because she had more exposure that favored her White racial identity. At an early age,
Jade struggled with the idea that she was forced to choose to identify with one, single race rather than being able to choose to be both. Approximately one year ago, Jade began her self-exploration of her Black racial identity, commencing with the process of returning her hair to its natural state instead of its chemically relaxed version. From there, the self-discovery of her Black racial identity was ignited.

As a biracial woman attending a PWI, stereotyping was a major part of most of her college experience, particularly in the classroom. Despite being biracial, Jade was often asked by some of her professors and peers to provide a statement for the “Black experience” as it related to the topic being discussed in class. This was a prime example of the stereotyping she combated on a regular basis.

As far as her student involvement on her predominantly White campus, she credited Southwest University for providing a wide variety of student involvement opportunities. In the stage of her Black racial identity development in which she believed herself to be in currently (Cross’s Immersion/Emersion), she deemed that her racial identity was a considering factor when it came to joining an organization but it had never deterred her from becoming involved on campus. While she did gain a sense of anxiety (which she spoke of in her narrative) she did not allow the idea of being the “only one” (Black person) in that space hinder her.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine racial identity amongst Black, female, undergraduate students who attended predominately White institutions (PWIs) and determine if their racial identity was linked to their college student involvement. This study consisted of three participants: two identifying as Black females and one identifying as a biracial
(White and Black) female. All of the participants were undergraduate students, either a junior or senior, and were currently involved or had been involved in one of more student organizations on their campus. After reflecting upon their narratives, each revealed that their racial identity did have an impact on their student involvement endeavors. Two of the participants indicated that their Black racial identity impacted their student involvement choices but it had never deterred them from becoming involved in a student organization. This was solely due to the fact that being the only Black person in a predominantly White space had been their everyday existence leading up to college. One participant stressed the fact that she typically would not consider an organization until she learned whether or not there were any Black students involved in that organization.

Regardless of the fact that Black racial identity played a significant role in their student involvement choices, each participant expressed the value and importance in which student involvement had on the overall college experience. According to all three participants, student involvement helped to build a sense of community. This was important because that community may be where one felt most accepted and embraced (statement from Danielle’s narrative).

**Major and Sub-Themes**

Three major themes emerged throughout the narratives. Within the major themes generated, there were also sub-themes that were common with each participant. This section will provide insight on the major themes engendered and the sub-themes that were discovered. Table 4.1 (below) shows the major themes and sub-themes generated from the narratives of the participants.

Table 4.1

<p>| Major Themes and Sub-Themes derived from participant narratives |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining Black racial identity</td>
<td>Physical aspects of Black racial identity (Natural Hair)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial identity importance</td>
<td>Racial identity importance and shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality of gender and race</td>
<td>Being a woman</td>
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<td>Being a Black woman</td>
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<td>Black racial identity and college student involvement</td>
<td>Pre-college extracurricular involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Racial identity and college student involvement</td>
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### Defining Black racial identity

**Physical aspects of Black racial identity.** When asked to share what it meant to be Black, each of the participants utilized physical traits to describe Blackness. The common sub-theme found within each of their descriptions when defining Black (in the physical sense) was the natural state of each participant’s hair. How each participant described and linked their hair to their Black racial identity was common through each definition of Blackness. Danielle described her hair as the second physical aspect of her racial identity, following her skin color. Gabrielle described her hair as being a major part of her racial identity, describing it as kinky, placing considerable value on the aesthetic of her natural hair. Jade identified the transition from
chemically relaxed hair to her natural hair as the commencing of the discovery of her Black racial identity as a bi-racial woman.

**Racial Identity Importance and Shame.** Racial identity importance and shame was another sub-theme that emerged. Two participants alluded to the fact that their racial, “shame” was stimulated within their formative years. Danielle made a point to reject her Black racial identity and made the choice to fully assimilate into the White culture. Danielle’s racial shame was stimulated through the attempt to build romantic relationships with White men. With not fully understanding why she was deemed not datable, this left her to wonder if it was because she was Black. She began wondering if Black was “good enough” in the heterosexual, interracial dating world. This was when she became negatively aware of her Blackness and questioning if she was seen as beautiful or equal to her White female counterparts. Jade indicated that she spent the majority of her adolescence ignoring her Black racial identity due to the fact that she was more exposed to her White racial identity. This resulted in her embracing this aspect of her White racial identity far more than her Black one. Jade’s racial identity awareness transcended from the commentary of her White peers throughout her upbringing utilizing phrases such as, “Oh she is the Whitest Black girl” and internalizing that phrase as a positive statement. Unfortunately, that was a false determination of who she would strive to be in order to gain full acceptance from her White peers. While Gabrielle did not necessarily experience racial shame, she did indicate that race was something that was never a major concern for her in her formative years of life.

As they progressed, each participant’s Black racial identity became valued and added an additional level of importance within their overall self. Jade referenced Cross’s Nigrescence Theory (1971, 1991), stating that she was currently in the Immersion/Emersion state of her Black
racial identity. Danielle associated Black racial identity as a component in her life that is every fiber of her being. Gabrielle indicated that she understands that she is a Black person within the world that she lives in.

**Intersectionality of gender and race**

**Being a woman.** The first sub-theme that emerged from participant interviews within this major theme was defining what it meant to be a woman. Before exploring the intersectionality of being a Black woman, it was important to engage the participants in the delineation of being a woman, regardless of race. The commonality found amongst participant stories was that most of the responses began with the negative attributes of what it meant to be a woman. For example, Danielle answered, “to be a woman is almost as much of a burden as being a Black person.” Danielle’s answer continued with phrases and descriptions such as having to prove yourself and having to minimize yourself. Gabrielle’s explanation “I don’t like being a woman” indicated that the female gender was associated with terms such as fragile. Lastly, Jade discussed the obstacles set in place that go against woman which made being a woman a challenge in today’s society.

**Being a Black woman.** The previous descriptors of being a woman indicated that when it came to their female gender identity, its initial association was negative. The participants’ progressed towards more positive ideations when it came to expressing their meaning of what it meant to be a Black woman. When the participants associated their racial identity with their female gender identity, the negative connotations of being a woman transgressed into a mixture of negative and positive inferences, moreso positive. The negative inferences stemmed from societal ignorance that was placed upon Black women while positive inferences stemmed from their desire to combat societal ignorance. The desire to combat negative with positive was more
prevalent when defending who they were as Black women moreso than with whom they were as solely women. Phrases and words that were used when describing what it meant to be a Black woman included “strength”, “beautiful”, “unique”, and “curvaceous”.

Black racial identity and college student involvement

Pre-college extra-curricular involvement. Gabrielle and Jade were the two participants who were highly involved in extracurricular activities prior to entering college while Danielle’s extra-curricular involvement was minimal. Although each of the participants had varied pre-college extra-curricular involvement, considering the value of college student involvement was consistent across all participants. Each of the participants entered into college with a variety of extra-curricular activities, which meant that these participants had some level of understanding regarding the concept of doing activities outside of their academics. Due to the involvement of pre-college extra-curricular activities, the participants deemed college involvement as a means of feeding the beliefs they truly cared about outside of the classroom. Participants said that college involvement was a way to support their interests and build a network of people who shared similar ideas.

Racial identity and college student involvement. The findings within this sub-theme indicated that race was a contributing factor to student involvement but in most cases (but not all), was not a deterring factor. Danielle spoke about the reality of how much her Black racial identity impacted her college involvement choices at a PWI. She discussed the importance of her racial identity and how it allowed for her to completely be herself when at times she was prevented from being herself in predominantly White spaces at Southwest University. This prompted her to explore college student involvement opportunities that allowed her to not feel marginalized for being her true self. But while she made a conscious effort to explore college
involvement opportunities that allowed her to eliminate the feeling of onliness, she indicated that she had never been deterred from being on a committee or being a part of an organization. If she allowed for deterrence to occur, she would have been limiting her options, not just with student involvement but in life in general.

Although Jade and Danielle had similar philosophies on their racial identity and college student involvement, Jade seemed more apt to be heavily involved in more organizations that did not necessarily have a cultural/racial connection. Gabrielle presented a different perspective, indicating that her racial identity absolutely had a major impact on her student involvement at Southwest University. Gabrielle indicated that it was very unlikely that she would participate in an organization if there were no Black people currently involved in the organization. Therefore her racial identity deterred her from becoming involved. In reflecting on their pre-college backgrounds and environments, this could have been an influence as to why Danielle and Jade’s racial identity was not a deterrent as it was for Gabrielle. Both Danielle and Jade grew up in predominantly White towns for a significant amount of time, while Gabrielle’s upbringing was in an area where the majority of the residents were Black.

The narratives of each participant generated a number of major themes and sub-themes that shed light on the major question and sub-questions that guided this research study. In chapter five the findings will be discussed as they relate to the theoretical framework, research, and literature.
Chapter Five: Discussions, Limitations, and Implications

Introduction

The narratives of each participant afforded the opportunity to learn from their experiences as it relates to their Black racial identity, gender identity, and their college student involvement. The study sought to address the following research question and sub-questions:

How do Black female college students make sense of their student involvement at a PWI?

Sub-questions:

How do Black female college students racial identity influence their campus involvement at a PWI?

How do Black female college students pre-college experiences influence their college student involvement?

How do Black female college students perceive their racial identity as a student at a PWI?

How do Black female college students perceive the ways in which institutions have adapted to their needs?

How do Black female college student think institutions should adapt to their needs?

In this chapter, discussions of findings as they relate to the problem statement, theoretical framework, and literature are presented. The researcher then addresses some of the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, general implications as well as implications for higher education professionals, particularly those working in student affairs.
Findings and the Problem of Practice

Social integration and student involvement are essential to the overall college experience (Braxton, 2001). Students strive to develop that feeling of being connected to their institution of learning. The full connectedness of a student’s college experience includes the interaction and engagement beyond the classroom. Research has shown that 75% of students leave college because of their difficulties related to a lack of fit between the skills and interest of the student, the organization of educational institutions, and/or their formal structures, resources, and patterns of association (Schuetz, 2008). Black students attending PWIs tend to encounter more difficulty with the social integration aspect of their college experience (Chavous, 2002). With PWIs becoming more diverse, it is crucial that institutions of higher education institutions stop assuming that a student must integrate into the institution, rather than challenging the institutions to adapt to the needs of students (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). The campus climate at a PWI is no longer a homogeneous student body structure. Institutions of higher learning can no longer approach the development of its institution with a one size fits all mentality and expect every student to automatically conform to or thrive in the campus climate and culture.

The findings of this study indicated that the Black female participants did seek to find their niche outside of the classroom in order to satisfy their interests and build a wider network. Student involvement was a component of their college experience that helped to provide them that opportunity. For example, Gabrielle sought student involvement opportunities on her own but was unsuccessful in finding one that was fulfilling; therefore her experience in working in Residential Life served as her means of maintaining a sense of involvement outside of the classroom. While the other two participants kept their student involvement minimal, they still
placed great value on being able to feel as though their interests, concerns, and ideas mattered amongst their peers and some faculty and staff.

According to the participants of this study, an unfriendly campus atmospheres can often lead to discomfort for Black females. Some of that discomfort may stem from the visual aesthetics of the campus and the marginalization of certain students. Being the only person of color in a space tends to be the norm for students of color at PWIs, specifically in classroom settings. The participants of the study mentioned that it is important to walk through your campus and feel as though you are being represented through faculty and staff as well as campus aesthetics (i.e. pictures). The participants of this study also made some suggestions as to how to make a college campus feel more inclusive which included hiring and retaining a more diverse faculty and staff. Danielle states that “institutions need to show students of color why this is a good institution for students of color”. In addition to diversifying and retaining a diverse faculty and staff, it is important to provide student involvement opportunities that allow for students of color to be in a space where they are not the only person of color in the space such racially/culturally/ethnically based student organizations.

Findings and the Literature

In analyzing the data, three major themes emerged: defining Black racial identity; intersectionality of gender and race; Black racial identity and student involvement. Within the three emerging themes there were two sub-themes that were associated with each major theme. The literature review, as well as other literature pertaining to the different themes, provided an abundance of information that aligned with much of the findings of this study. The purpose of this section is to connect the major themes and sub-themes to the literature.
Defining Black Racial Identity. One of the major themes that emerged from analyzing the data was defining Black racial identity. Within this theme transpired two sub-themes: physical aspects of Black racial identity (natural hair) and racial identity importance and shame. Each of the participants of the study had natural hair, which meant that their hair was not chemically relaxed. Each participant referenced their natural hair as part of their racial identity development indicating that their hair now signifies beauty but during the earlier years of their lives signified racial shame. Colorism, skin tone, and hair have been a consistent concern for Black females. According to Robinson (2011), “along the beauty continuum amongst Black females the presence or absence of kinky hair can make the difference between being attractive and unattractive, accepted or unaccepted” (p. 364). Due to the fact that kinky hair reflects African rather than European ancestry, kinky hair tends to have a low social status particularly for Black females (Robinson, 2011). Black women have often compared their beauty standards to that of the European standards of beauty (Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha, 2011). The desire to match or keep up with the European beauty standards has been such a desire that Black women tend to resort to straightening or lightening their hair simply to be closer to the standards of European beauty. Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011) mentioned that “the pain of wanting to be accepted by others results in practices of applying perms to hair so that it is straighter or removing dreadlocks, may impede the development of healthy self-esteem for Black women” (p. 537). Two of the ladies in this study, Danielle and Jade, admitted to having the desire to reach a certain beauty standard, not based off their own ideas of beauty but based off society’s beauty standards which is typically compared to that of European beauty. It was not until later in their life that Danielle and Jade accepted their beauty standards as their own versus that of European decent.
Racial/ethnic identity models suggested that individuals moved from having naïve beliefs about their racial group status, holding negative feelings about their racial group, or placing low salience on race, to developing a sense of racial pride (Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha, 2011). According to Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011), “racial identity serves as a buffer for acts of racism, discrimination, or prejudice” (p. 531). In regards to the second sub-theme (racial identity importance and shame), two of the participants (Danielle and Jade) experienced different modes of racial shame stemming from their environmental background and, with Jade, her biracial identity. Participants used language that indicated the prevalence of racial shame throughout their formative years of life such as “not good enough”.

A major influence of racial shame occurs from a lack of racial socialization. Racial socialization is the development of healthy racial identity amongst Black individuals (Anglin & Wade, 2007). Racial socialization is extremely important within the African American/Black community in order to develop a sense of pride about one’s Black racial identity versus shame. The lack of racial socialization may lead to a lack of knowledge of understanding the value of one’s Black racial identity. While two of the participants of this study were impacted by their racial shame, one participant (Gabrielle) continuously embraced her Blackness. This indicates that not all Black individuals respond the same way to racial identity (Porter & Washington, 1979). There are many coinciding factors that impact a person’s racial identity development. Some may go through the stage of racial shame and not embrace their Black identity. According to Cross’s Nigrescence Theory (1971, 1991) this is the pre-encounter stage. The pre-encounter stage is where many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture are absorbed (Cross, 1994). Other individuals may embrace racial pride and may never experience racial shame. Black racial identity development is not a synchronized process amongst all individuals. Sanders
Thompson (2001) believes that racial identity is a multidimensional construct, often incorporating additional aspects of one’s overall identity that contributes to sense of self. Each of the participants of this study had different experiences when it came to their racial identity development. Gabrielle experienced racial pride for the majority of her life never having the desire to assimilate into White culture. Jade and Danielle experienced different stages of racial identity, experiencing racial shame to developing a sense of racial pride.

**Intersectionality of Gender and Race.** As defined by Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomilson (2013) “intersectionality is a method and disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool and is rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory” (p.303). Intersectionality is a method that has been heavily criticized by some scholars as focusing “too much” on Black women. This study focused on two intersecting identities of each of the participant’s: gender (female) and race (Black).

From a feminist post-structuralist lens “gender is not a fixed characteristic, but rather one that is produced, negotiated, and reinforced within social structures” (Harris & Lester, 2009, p. 107). Female gender development is viewed from a variety of perspectives. Similar to racial identity development, gender development is not a conformed idea in which women go through their stages of development in similar ways. Models of gender and womanist identity suggest that women move from having superficial or naïve beliefs regarding gender, gender-role expectations, and gender identity, to developing a more sophisticated understanding of their gender identity (Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha, 2011). Gender identity is impacted by many other intersecting identities that determines how a person defines themselves as a woman. For example, a person’s race or sexual orientation may impact how they view themselves as a woman.
Other aspects such as societal viewpoints may also impact a woman’s outlook on her gender identity. One of the sub-themes that was generated from this major theme focused on the idea of being a woman. All of the participants of the study indicated the hardships and negative aspects of being a woman. Jade indicated that as an educated woman she would be able to be empowered and teach other people different things but she could see the obstacles that are in place that go against woman. Danielle stated “to be a woman is a burden…. To be a woman means you have to prove yourself and you have to minimize yourself.” It was a challenge to express the positive aspects of their female identity. This stems from the idea that within gender and womanist identity development the beliefs of their overall gender is not always a sophisticated understanding but rather a superficial societal understanding, which may result in a false ideation of their gender identity.

According to Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011) “literature that focuses specifically on identity development, self-concept, and self-esteem of African American/Black females includes the influence of oppression and stereotypical images and the need for self-determination or strength” (p.531). In another study conducted by Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996) they indicated that “African American/Black women have the distinction of being the only group that was enslaved and brought to the United States to work, to produce, and to reproduce and this legacy of racism and sexism that was prevalent during slavery continues today” (p. 465). According to their study, one of the most surprising findings in their study was the emergence of the notion of strength. This was also prevalent when analyzing the data of this study. When the participants were asked to explore what it means to be a Black woman words such as strength, compassion, and being resourceful were used. Gabrielle stated that “I make a conscious decision to be strong minded.” Gabrielle also mentions the fact that throughout her life she has never
stopped fighting no matter what has happened in her life. She spoke about this idea of strength that Black people have that may not be seen across other cultures, races, and ethnicities. Danielle talked about the sense of resilience that is wrapped up in her own identity as a Black woman. She talked about the struggle and strength of contending and combatting with some of the narratives in which people have a certain idea about who you are or who you might be.

According to Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996), “racial identity was a salient and central aspect of a women’s self-identity and race, more than any other area, was a source of self-definition” (p. 471). The participants had a different outlook on their gender identity when it coincided with their racial identity. Gabrielle mentioned that being a Black woman meant having “double the strength.”

**Black racial identity and student involvement.** According to Harper and Quaye (2007) many African American/Black students face racism, isolation, and socio-cultural challenges and academic obstacles at PWI’s. Harper and Quaye (2007) indicated “that previous studies revealed the beneficial effects of engagement in student organizations and out of class activities on identity development, retention, and other outcomes produced in college for African American/Black students” (p. 130). Two themes arose from this main theme: pre-college extracurricular involvement and racial identity and college student involvement. Each of the participants of this study suggested that being involved at their PWI was important to their overall college experience. The participants affirmed that student involvement in college was a way to support their interest and build a network of people similar to what their extra-curricular activities did for them prior to college.

One of the sub-themes that emerged was related to pre-college extracurricular involvement. Each of the participants were involved in extracurricular activities in some
capacity prior to attending college. According to Stanley (2014), “extracurricular activities are often categorized as being organized or unorganized” (p. 233). In 2014 Stanley conducted a study in which the main purpose was to determine whether organized activity involvement was linked with Black racial identity. His study revealed that organized activities may have offered an environment that fosters an individual’s sense of belonging while also nurturing a sense of self. Each of the participants entered into college with extracurricular activity experience which showed that each participant had pre-knowledge of what it meant to be involved outside of the classroom. This prior knowledge could have helped to frame their ideas of the meaning of what it meant to be involved as a college student and how that could potentially impact their overall college experience. Danielle indicated that involvement in college was very important as far as networking goes and building a sense of community where you felt accepted and embraced.

Racial identity and college student involvement was the other sub-theme that emerged. According to Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995), “African American/Black participation in mainstream campus organizations may be lower than average” (p. 330). Jacoby (1991) pinpointed three themes that affected African American/Black students’ dissatisfaction with their college experience. One of those themes was a poor selection of campus activities related to the African American/Black students’ life experiences. The participants of this study chose to include co-curricular involvement as part of their college experience. Each participant selected their different college involvement opportunities based off their own criteria that would most benefit their overall college experience. Gabrielle chose her student involvement based off whether or not there were other African American/Black students participating in the organization. Gabrielle was very adamant about not wanting to be the only Black person represented in the group. Gabrielle’s decision to ensure that she was not the only Black person
represented in a student group indicated Gabrielle’s avoidance of experiencing onlyness.

Onlyness is a term that is prevalently utilized when discussing students of color at a predominantly White institution. Harper (2013) defined the term onlyness as “the psycho-emotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one’s same racial or ethnic group” (p.189). The participants of this study discussed being the only Black person or being the token Black person in their classroom setting. Because of constantly being the only Black person or one of very few Black people in the classroom setting the participants, particularly Gabrielle, made it a point to eliminate that experience outside of the classroom. This was an area of her overall college experience that Gabrielle could control and she made the choice to not participate in a student organization if she was the only Black student. Guffrida (2003) talked about cultural student organizations helping to maintain minority retention at PWIs. Not all students of color engage in culturally based organizations but there is value in making connections through these types of organizations. If there was not any participation from Black students this deterred Gabrielle from being a member of an organization. Danielle and Jade took a different approach towards selecting their student involvement at their institution. While their racial identity did have some impact on how they chose to be involved outside the classroom, it did not necessarily deter them from being involved in a student organization if they were the only Black person in that organization. These two participants did make it a point to select organizations where they were amongst other students of color.

This section connected key ideas from the literature to findings of this study. The literature provided background information to the findings of this study. By connecting the
findings to the literature, it helped the researcher to avoid researcher interpretations of the narratives that could potentially result in the “Hollywood Plot” scenario.

**Applying the Theoretical Framework to the Findings**

The theoretical framework used to guide this research was Critical Race Feminism (CRF). CRF is designed to acknowledge, address, and accept racial experiences as different from those who identify as male and from women who identify as “non-women of color” (Berry, 2010). CRF also recognizes the multiple and intersectionality of identities amongst women of color. CRF is a theory that focuses on women of color as a whole and this is specifically the reason for the use of this theory for this study. While a theory that focuses on Black women is very much applicable to this study, the use of CRF is a framework that allows for exploration of other women of color on predominantly White college campuses, such as Latina or Asian.

The study focused on two intersecting identities which were race (Blackness) and gender (female). Richard Delgado (2012) discusses intersectionality and defined it as the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combination plays out in various settings. The intersecting identities of Black females were the two identities that were the primary focal points. Developing the research questions was inclusive of the theoretical framework and while the questions were specific to Black females, the questions could easily be interchangeable and applied to other women of color. This also holds true to the interview questions.

Critical Race Feminism is a theoretical framework that is catered to the storytelling/narrative aspects of qualitative research and that was another consideration when selecting an appropriate theoretical framework for the study. CRF includes the methodological
concepts of storytelling, narrative, voice, auto-ethnography, and phenomenology (Pratt-Clarke, 2012). By utilizing CRF as the theoretical framework for this study, it brought the concerns of women of color, specifically Black women, to the center rather than the margins of this research topic. Each participant of this study provided rich data by sharing their individual stories as it relates to the research topic. The interview questions were designed to encourage elaborate storytelling. The interview questions were open ended and additional probing questions were asked based off of the stories that were being told. The interview questions served as guiding questions for the researcher but many of the questions emerged based off of the lived experiences being shared through stories of the participants.

The findings of this study came about through the narratives of three Black females. The three main themes that were generated through the stories of the lived experiences of each individual were themes that were specific to this study. The theoretical framework utilized may adapt the study to focus on other women of color who are undergraduate students who attend PWIs. Bits and pieces of the findings of this study could arise with another group of participants. The framework may allow for similar findings to be generated amongst a different group of female students.

Limitations, Recommendations for future research, and Implications

Limitations. Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the use of participant storytelling it is the researcher’s responsibility to listen to the individual stories of participants, accurately interpret the stories, and relay findings based on those stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 2011). While the research study met its goal of depicting the lived experiences of the participants as it relates to the research study, there were limitations to this study that should be acknowledged.
The first limitation of this study is the fact that the all of the data was collected from participants who all attended the same PWI. Collecting data from one institution can limit what kind of data is collected because the participants of the study are sharing their different lived experiences but their lived experiences all stem from attending one institution. Having a variety of research sites could diversify the data due to the fact that the lived experiences are from multiple types of institutions that may offer a different experience to this student population.

The research study consisted of three participants which could serve as another possible limitation to this study. Mason (2010) shared three reasons for utilizing a smaller sample size in qualitative research: 1) Frequencies are not as important because more data does not necessarily lead to more information; 2) Qualitative research is more concerned with making meaning verse generalizing hypothesized statements; and 3) Qualitative research is very labor intensive and analyzing a large sample can be time consuming and often impractical. Therefore a smaller sample size was deemed appropriate in order to hone in on the storytelling aspect of this qualitative research.

Lastly, each of the participants of this study identified as Black/ African American or bi-racial. Diversifying the racial identity pool amongst the Black race may have provided another layer of rich data. For example, interviewing students who identified as African or West Indian and possibly international may have expanded the perspectives as it relates to the research study.

**Recommendations for Future Research.** The study contributes to the literature on racial identity amongst Black females undergraduate students and their student involvement at a PWI. There are a number of recommendations that are included in order to better enlighten research related to racial identity and Black female undergraduate students attending PWIs. As previously mentioned, the theoretical framework used for this study was Critical Race Feminism
(CRF). CRF is a theory that was designed to offer the possibility for understanding and researching the experiences of women of color. CRF focuses on women of color as a whole versus one specific group of women of color and therefore future research recommendations should include exploring this topic area as it relates to racial identity amongst other women of color who attend PWIs and their student involvement. Future research may also include the experiences of racial identity amongst Black undergraduate males and their student involvement at a PWI. Additionally, a comparative analysis of the two groups (Black males and females) and their student involvement opportunities at a PWI may be beneficial to this research area.

Another area of research consideration should be through the lens of different institution types such as urban, rural, or suburban as well as historically Black colleges and universities, private liberal arts, state research, etc.

Implications for Higher Education. Nganga (2001) introduces three areas relevant to developing oneself as a scholar practitioner. Those three areas include: the fire and ice metaphor, voices of students as a developing scholar practitioner, and finding one’s voice in developing your scholar practitioner identity. In regards to this research study, the most relevant area of development is listening to the voices of the students as one develops into a scholar practitioner. In the field of higher education, particularly student affairs, one is charged to effectively develop a campus in which the needs of all student populations are being met. Pertaining to the Black female undergraduate student population who attend PWIs, as student affairs professionals it is important to understand that Black racial identity amongst this student population may have some impact on how they choose their student involvement activities on their campus.

According to Tierny (1992), “social integrationists have hypothesized that success in college is contingent upon individual’s ability to adapt academically and socially into the life of
the institution” (p.614). While this statement may be true in some ways, it is not solely the responsibility of students to conform to the culture of the institution. This is a responsibility shared between the institution and the individual student. Institutions of higher education must ensure that the student involvement opportunities at PWIs offer a variety of clubs and organizations that allow for Black female undergraduate students to feel a sense of belongingness and connects this group of students to their campus. Oftentimes students of color may encounter onlyness on a predominantly White campus. Black undergraduate females, along with other students of color or marginalized groups, sense of belonging may often lead to connectedness to their PWI.

In addition to developing a campus that provides students with a sense of belongingness and connectedness, providing spaces on a predominantly White campus where Black females can develop a network or a sense of community. Predominantly White college campuses have developed cultural centers on their campus and this has proved to be a critical part of recruiting and retaining students of color (Hefner, 2002). Specifically, Black cultural centers date back to the early 1900s when small numbers of Black students were selected to attend White institutions (Hefner, 2002). Historically, these centers served as a place where students could go to counter the resistance to Blacks on predominantly White campuses (Hefner, 2002). This type of space may be where Black females can build comradery amongst each other or with other like-minded people that may have similar interests not solely based on their racial connection. This space can serve as a space where this population of students can be their authentic self on a campus where they may not always have the opportunity to be themselves.

As student affairs and higher education professionals, we must be vulnerable in our positions and allow for genuine information seeking conversations with Black undergraduate
females to gauge how the college student involvement experience is going. Doing a campus climate survey and/or focus groups that places emphasis on college student involvement is a tool for gathering data in this specific area. Utilizing this type of data may be useful in helping to enhance student involvement opportunities in order decrease marginalization amongst this student population.

As a practitioner in the field of higher education, I will take the information in which I have gathered from this research and put it towards understanding, not only Black women attending a PWI, but other women of color as well. Currently, I work at a small private PWI in the Southwest region of the United States of America. This research has prompted me to be more aware of the challenges women of color face when it comes to attending a PWI. As a women of color working at a PWI, it is important that I am aware of the intersecting identities of women of color and how that plays into their overall college experience. As a scholar practitioner, I must make it my responsibility to strategically develop ways for women of color to find their niche on the campus. The best way to do that is to listen to the stories of their lived experiences as a college student at a PWI and work towards developing opportunities for women of color, particularly Black women, to find their sense of belonging.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate student who attend a predominantly White institution and determine if their racial identity was linked to their student involvement. An analysis of interviews with three female college students, which two of the participants identified as African-American and one of the participants identified as biracial (Black/African American & White/Caucasian), revealed three main themes and two subthemes within each of the main themes. The three main themes were 1)
Defining Black racial identity, 2) Intersectionality of gender and race, 3) Black racial identity and student involvement. The six subthemes were 1a) physical aspects of Black racial identity (natural hair), 1b) racial identity importance and shame, 2a) being a woman, 2b) being a Black woman, 3a) pre-college extracurricular involvement, 3b) racial identity and college student involvement.

The findings of this study are consistent with what has been presented in existing literature about Black college students and other racial minorities on predominantly White campuses. According to Chavous (2002), African-American students who do not establish supportive communities at their PWI often experience feelings of discomfort, social isolation, and stress. Additionally, students want to feel as though they matter on their college campus. McMillan and Chavis (1986) indicate that all students, particularly Black students at PWIs, have the desire to feel that they matter to one another and to the campus as a whole. Winkle-Wagner (2009) indicated that developing an understanding of Black women’s struggles and successes in college, particularly at PWIs, can help to identify strategies to better suit the needs of Black females students and perhaps other underrepresented groups. Students need to feel as though they matter on their campus and when that sense of mattering does not necessarily come from the classroom, students may look towards student involvement opportunities on their campus.

The findings of this study also speak to the ways in which Black females make meaning of their intersecting identities, particularly race (Black) and gender (female). For the three participants of this study, their racial identity played a significant role in how they became involved on their predominantly White campus. Gabrielle indicated that her student involvement was profoundly impacted by her racial identity to the point that she would not become involved in a student organization if she was the only Black student in the organization. Danielle and Jade
indicated that their racial identity played a significantly role in there student involvement but did not necessarily deter them from being a part of that organization if they were the only Black person in the organization. They both mentioned that they do make a conscious effort to seek organizations on campus where they were amongst other students of color.

The findings of this study provided insight in ways in which Black females attending PWIs can be best supported at their institutions. Harper and Quaye (2009) convey the importance of listening to students in order to understand how to enhance their educational experiences. By listening to the stories of these three participants and seeking to understand their lived experiences as it pertains to being a Black female college student at a PWI and their student involvement provides some insight on how to best support and develop opportunities for involvement for this particularly student group.
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Appendix A

Recruitment Email (Initial Message)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Jasmine Willis Requests your Participation

Dear Name of Department/Office,

My name is Jasmine Willis and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am beginning the process of conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

The purpose of this study is to examine racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students who attend predominately white institutions (PWI’s) and determine if their racial identity is linked to their student involvement at a PWI. As the researcher, my goal is develop an awareness racial identity amongst Black undergraduate females and how they determine their college student involvement decisions.

The reason for this email is to request a list of the campus’ student organizations and the names and email addresses of the presidents/leaders of those organizations. In order to answer any questions and provide additional information about myself and the study I would like to schedule a meeting with you. Attached you will find a copy of my Institutional Review Board paperwork.

If you could please respond to this email with two dates and times in which you we are able to schedule a brief meeting (via phone/in person/skype or google hangout) that would be greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this email and I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,
Jasmine Willis
willis.ja@husky.neu.edu
Appendix B

Recruitment Email
(Request to share information at a student organization meeting)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Jasmine Willis Requests to Share Information about a Research Study

Dear Insert Name of Student Organization,

My name is Jasmine Willis and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am beginning the process of conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

The purpose of this study is to examine racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students who attend predominately white institutions (PWI’s) and determine if their racial identity is linked to their student involvement at a PWI. As the researcher, my goal is develop an awareness racial identity amongst Black undergraduate females and how they determine their college student involvement decisions.

The email serves as a request to share information about the study to those who are members of your student organization at your next member meeting. I am asking for 10-15 minutes of your meeting time to share information about this study in the hopes of recruiting participants. If my request is granted, would you please respond to this email with the following information:

- Organization member contact information (first & last name, email, contact number)
- Two possible dates and times in which I would be able to attend a meeting. Please include the locations of these meetings

Please email me at willis.ja@husky.neu.edu and include the information listed above. Thank you.

Regards,
Jasmine Willis
Subject Line: Jasmine Willis Requests your Participation

Dear Students,

My name is Jasmine Willis and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am beginning the process of conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

The purpose of this study is to examine racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students who attend predominately white institutions (PWI’s) and determine if their racial identity is linked to their student involvement at a PWI. As the researcher, my goal is develop an awareness racial identity amongst Black undergraduate females and whether there is a connection between their racial identity and student involvement.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will be interviewing you about your racial identity development and your student involvement as an undergraduate student. The expected time commitment is between 45 – 90 minutes over the course of two interactions (two in person). A third interaction may be required if additional follow-up information is requested from you (in person or skype/google hangout). You will be given a $15 gift card for participating in this study.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please email me at willis.ja@husky.neu.edu and include the information listed below. I will provide you with additional details about the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Number:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred days and times to meet (including weekends):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Regards,

Jasmine Willis
Appendix D

Recruitment Email (Follow-Up Message)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Jasmine Willis Requests your Participation

Dear Students,

Approximately one week ago you received an email about a research study that I am conducting for my doctoral thesis.

This is a reminder to email me at willis.ja@husky.neu.edu if you are interested in participating.

Thank you again for considering participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Willis

*Note: This is a follow up email that will be sent to students that do not respond within seven to ten days of the initial email. With the follow up email, the initial email will be forwarded to students so they can easily refer to the information included in the initial and respond accordingly. If the researcher receives the number of participants required for this study after sending the initial email the follow-up email will not be sent.
Appendix E
Recruitment Email (Researcher to Student)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Research Study with Jasmine Willis

Dear (Student),

Thank you for your interest in my research study. As you know, my name is Jasmine Willis and I am currently working on my doctoral thesis for the Doctor of Education degree program at Northeastern University under the guidance of Dr. Ronald Brown.

The purpose of this study is to examine racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students who attend predominately white institutions (PWI’s) and determine if their racial identity is linked to their student involvement at a PWI. My intent is to learn more about racial identity amongst Black undergraduate females and how that is linked to their college student involvement.

For this study, I am recruiting participants that meet the following criteria:

- Racial Identity of Black (includes but not limited: African American, West Indian, African, Black)
- Full time undergraduate student (must be taking at least 12-15 credits per semester)
- Junior or senior academic status (credit-wise)
- Active in at least one currently active in campus clubs, organizations, or associations (excluding division athletics) that is registered with the campus student activities office

If you decide to participate in this study, you will have two definite interactions and a possible third interaction with me. The first interview is to serve as an introductory interview that will focus on your life history and your perceptions of your racial and gender identity, as well as your whole self. I will ask you to fill out a short participant questionnaire. You will select a pseudonym to protect your identity, you will be presented with a consent form, and you can ask me questions about the study. The first interview is expected to last approximately 45 – 90 minutes. The second interview will seek to discover your role within your campus student involvement, how they went about selecting their areas of student involvement. The second interview is expected to last 45 – 90 minutes. The third interaction will be required if additional information is needed from you after review of the transcribed interviews.

Based on your availability, I would like to propose __________ as the time for our first meeting. Please let me know if you have a particular place where you would like to meet. Keep in mind that we will need a quiet place suitable for audio recording our conversation.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Please email me (willis.ja@husky.neu.edu) or call me (781-408-9306) if you have any questions.

Regards, Jasmine Willis
Appendix F

Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Profession Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Ron Brown, Jasmine Willis

Title of Project: RACIAL IDENTITY AMONGST BLACK UNDERGRADUATE FEMALES WHO ATTEND PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS AND HOW IT IS LINKED TO THEIR COLLEGE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this study because you meet the following criteria.

- Racial Identity of Black (includes but not limited: African American, West Indian, African, half Black)
- Full time undergraduate student (must be taking at least 12-15 credits per semester)
- Junior or Senior academic status (credit-wise)
- Active in at least one currently active in campus clubs, organizations, or associations (excluding division athletics) that is registered with the campus student activities office

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine racial identity amongst Black female undergraduate students who attend predominately white institutions (PWI’s) and determine if their racial identity is linked to their student involvement at a PWI.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked a series of questions during two face to face interviews and a possible third interview pending transcription and analysis of the data. The objective of the first interview is to serve as an introductory interview that will focus on the life history of the participants and their perceptions of their racial and gender identity, as well as their whole self. The second interview will seek to discover your role within your campus student involvement, how they went about selecting their areas of student involvement. The second interview is expected to last 45 – 90 minutes. The third interaction will be required if additional information is needed from you after review of the transcribed interviews.
Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed in on the college campus that is the research site. The room location will be in a quiet place suitable for audio recording our conversation. The interview will take place in a room with the student union. The first interview is expected to last approximately 45 – 90 minutes. The second interview is expected to last 45 – 90 minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

While the risks of this study are minimal to nonexistent, as a participant of this study, you have the right to decline from answering any question if you feel uncomfortable for any reason.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

The information received from this study may help to expand the understanding how to best support the needs of this student population. By participating in this study they may learn more about yourself and your student involvement on a predominantly white college campus.

Who will see the information about me?

If the participant’s identity WILL NOT be matched to their responses:

As a participant of this study, you will receive a pseudonym in order to protect your identity and to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process. Pseudonyms serve as a replacement of actual participant’s names. Other identifiers that may be used to describe you will include: their academic year, their major, the clubs and organizations in which they are involved in and other basic general identifiers related to the person as a student. The name of the institution (research site) will be given a pseudonym as well.

The recording devices are password protected and can only be accessed by the researcher. The traditional tape recorder will be locked in a safe which is only accessible by the researcher. Upon completing the interviews, each interview will be professionally transcribed and the transcribed data will be saved on a flash drive, external hard drive, as well as within google docs (or other web based document saving mechanism). Printed copies of the transcriptions will be secured in the same lock box as the tape recorder device. Once the study and the dissertation are completed, defended and passed, all recorded materials, transcriptions, and field notes will be archived into a secured space. In addition to audio recordings and transcriptions being safely protected, and mode of participant communication, such as email address or cell phone numbers will be protected by the researcher’s password locked computer and cellular phone.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?

You have the choice to not participate in this study at any time.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?

Due to the minimal to nonexistent risk of this study, I do not anticipate you experiencing or suffering from any harm during this study. In the event that you do experience or suffer from
any harm, no special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Jasmine Willis, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Ron Brown, the Principal Investigator.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

You will be given a $15 gift card as soon as you complete the study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There no cost associated with participating in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

N/A

**I agree to take part in this research.**

______________________________   ___________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part          Date

______________________________
Printed name of person above
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

Date

Printed name of person above
Appendix G

Participant Questionnaire

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Personal Information

Today’s date: ______________________________________________
Full name: _______________________________________________
Pseudonym: _______________________________________________
Date of birth: ____________________________________________

Where did you grow up? Please include the city, state/country and the length of time you lived in each location as well as a brief description of your neighborhood atmosphere.

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Briefly describe your pre-college experience
*High School environment
*Where you grew up
*Extracurricular involvement outside of academics
*Additional information

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Please select one of the following that best indicates your racial identification. If none apply, please share your preferred racial identification in the space provided below.

__ African American __ West Indian

__ African __

__ Bi or multi Race (includes Black/ African American) (please identify your races):__

__ Other: ____________________________________________________________

Academic History

Major: _____________________________________________________________

Year of study: ____________________________________________________

College Student Involvement Information

Please list all past and current student involvement activities/organizations/associations in which you are involved. All activities must be those registered with the student activities office of your campus. Please include your membership affiliation with each organization (i.e. position held, member).

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

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Appendix H

Interview Guide for Interview 1
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

What does it mean to you to be Black?

Possible prompts:
What aspects of your identity indicate your race as Black?
Please share other aspects of your race that may not be considered Black?

How important is race to your sense of who you are?

What does it mean to you to be a woman?

Possible prompts: What does it mean to be a Black woman?

How important is gender to your sense of who you are?

Discuss your overall identity?

Possible prompts: Are their ways in which race or gender impact your overall identity?

What is like to be a Black female college student at your school?

Possible prompts:
What assumptions do others make about you based off your race and your gender?
What are some stereotypes you face being a Black woman in college?

Do you remember what is was like before you were initially aware of your race and before it meant anything to others? Please explain.

What does the term racial identity mean to you?

Possible prompts: How would you describe your racial identity as a Black woman?
When were you first aware of your racial identity?

Possible Prompts:

When did it first matter to you or others?

Can you describe any experiences that made you aware of your racial identity?

Do you think that your identity as a Black woman has changed throughout your year in college?

Growing up were you involved in any organizations?

Possible Prompts:

Were these organizations with your own race?

Were you the minority within any of the organizations?

Please share your pre-college experiences in academia and within your community?

Possible Prompts:

Describe your school setting?

Describe the neighborhood(s) in which you grew up in?

Describe the value placed on race within your family?

*Note: Additional prompt and follow-up questions will be added throughout the interview depending on how participants answer the questions.*
Appendix I

Interview Guide for Interview 2
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Prior to attending college what extracurricular activities/organization were you involved in?

Possible Prompts:

What organizations/activities were you a part of that were not affiliated with school?
What organization/activities were you a part of that were affiliated with school?

Prior to college were any of the extracurricular activities or organizations that you were part of multicultural or racially affiliated?

What does it mean to be involved in college?

Possible Prompts:

Does your institution have a student involvement/activities office?
Do you know approximately how many student organizations/clubs/associations your campus offers?

What kind of value do you place on you student involvement in college?

Possible Prompts:

Do you thing that being involved outside of the classroom is important to you overall college experience?

Does your institution offer a variety of student involvement opportunities?

Possible Prompts:

Do you think that there are diverse selections of student involvement opportunities? (i.e. gender, academic, religious, sexual orientation, race/ethnic/cultural)
What organizations/activities/associations have you been involved in throughout college?

*Possible Prompts:*

Are any of the organizations/activities/associations affiliated with you race?

Are any of the organizations/activities/associations similar to those you were involved in prior to college?

Are any of the organizations/activities/associations related to your current interest or hobbies? Or are they something you never tried before?

How much time outside of class do you spend with your organizations/activities/associations?

*Possible Prompts:*

Do you hold a leadership position within any of the organizations/activities/associations you are affiliated with?

What are some of the contributing factors that played a key role in helping you select your student involvement membership?

Do you think that your racial identity plays a significant role in determining your student involvement?

*Possible Prompts:*

Have you ever determined which organizations/activities/associations to be a part of based off your racial identity?

If so, in what ways do you think your racial identity plays a significant role in your student involvement?

*Possible Prompt:*

Do you think there is a correlation between your racial identity and your student involvement organization/activities/associations?
If not, why do you think that your racial identity does not play a role in your student involvement selection?

*Note: Additional prompt and follow-up questions will be added throughout the interview depending on how participants answer the questions.