STUDENT VOICES: THE ENGAGEMENT BLACK STUDENTS WISH FOR WITH BLACK FACULTY AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Black students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) do not interact with Black faculty, which can impact their engagement with the university. The purpose of this research was to understand the experience that Black students have at a PWI due to the presence or lack of presence of Black faculty and how that impacts their engagement and retention at the university. This issue matters because Black students are not retained and do not graduate at the same rates as White students. If Black students are not engaged, they will continue to leave; however, resolution of this issue may result in improved student satisfaction and increased retention. The research question explored in this study centered on how Black students at a PWI perceive their experiences with Black faculty. Critical race theory (CRT) was used with an interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology. Six Black students were interviewed individually and then participated in a focus-group discussion. The following themes arose during the conversations: classrooms at a PWI, seeing someone who looks like me, our voice represented on campus, and finding support. The students shared that they want to see Black faculty so they may cultivate mentor relationships and see greater possibilities for their future. They also want to have their voice represented on campus. In addition to building mentoring relationships, another recommendation is to provide students with the opportunity to network with Black faculty currently at the university.

Keywords: Black students, Black faculty, engagement, community, oppression, Black student voice
DEDICATION

To my ancestors: I hope this is everything you dreamed of and more.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all my cheerleaders (there are way too many to name): Thank you for your unending encouragement and support on this journey. There were days I was ready to quit, but y’all wouldn’t let me. Thank you for pushing me, motivating me, distracting me when needed, and making sure I got to this point.

Thank you to my parents. You never told me I couldn’t do anything, even if the thought crossed your mind. You knew something about the world that I would later find out: being Black in America, we needed to be better. You instilled in me a sense of pride and determination, and without that, I wouldn’t be here.

To Summer, Maxine, Kim, Malcolm, Richard, and Nikki: Thank you all for sharing your stories with me. I am forever grateful. You all gave me things to think about. Education has the power to take you many places. Continue to be your authentic selves and go after all the opportunities that come across your path. Find someone who will push and motivate you and make sure that you keep reaching for the top. You are all destined for greatness and I can’t wait to see what lies ahead for you. I challenge you to be that someone who younger students will see that looks like us.

To my god-niece, Olivia, and nephew, Jacob: My hope for you is that you grow to understand the greatness of the Gardner legacy and the sacrifice of our ancestors to make sure we have opportunities like this. Always remember the wish of your great-grandparents: “Whatever you want to be, be the best.”

Thank you to my committee, Dr. Kristal Moore Clemons, Dr. Lynda Beltz, and Dr. Ayanna Allen-Handy. I could not have asked for a better group of women to help me in this final part of the journey. You all seemed to have a faith in me that I sometimes lacked. Thank you!
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The issue of Black students finding their fit in college and graduating drives this researcher to work every day. The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) at the university in the present study reports that Black undergraduate students make up a small percentage of the population: only 6.3% in 2017-2018. The one-year retention rate for Black students is 84%, compared to 90% for White students; the six-year graduation rate for Black students is 52%, compared to 71% for White students. These numbers highlight the need for Black students to be supported so they can be retained and graduate at rates more comparable to their White counterparts.

At the time of this study, Black faculty made up 6.5% of the total faculty population at the research site. While the OIR provided information on Black faculty at the institution for the 2017-2018 academic year, unfortunately it does not distinguish between undergraduate- and graduate-level faculty. Of the 11 colleges or schools with undergraduate degree programs, six (55%) employed fewer than ten Black faculty members (see Table 1). The ratio of Black faculty to Black undergraduate students represents a clear imbalance. Black faculty may be overrepresented in areas like nursing because some of them may teach only at the graduate level. Regardless of whether Black faculty teach at the undergraduate or graduate level, there still seem to be opportunities for them to connect with undergraduate students. In fact, these faculty may help more Black students see themselves represented among the faculty and begin to see themselves as potential faculty members.
Table 1

Black Faculty and Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College/School</th>
<th># of Black Faculty</th>
<th>% of Faculty within College/School</th>
<th># of Black Students</th>
<th># of Black Students within College/School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10.06</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>10.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11.32</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Arts</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.69</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>8.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40.25</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>10.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Studies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lack of Black faculty at a predominantly White institution (PWI) can be a challenge for the engagement and retention of Black students because they are not able to see themselves in the faculty who teach them, which may result in less emotional, social, and academic support. While increasing the number of Black faculty would be ideal, universities can implement various programs and training to increase Black students’ comfort level and engagement at PWIs.

Black students face additional challenges at PWIs. They begin to question and explore their cultural and racial identities, experience racism or microaggressions due to stereotypes, and struggle to find spaces on campus where they can be themselves (Elion, Wang, Slaney, & French, 2012; McCoy, 2014; Payne & Suddler, 2014; Winograd & Rust, 2014). Black students are especially vulnerable to leaving college due to factors like experiencing financial constraints and feeling a lack of connectedness with the institution (Allen, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2008;
Tinto, 1975). By exploring what Black students at PWIs need to persist and remain engaged at school, administrators can start to implement programs at their institutions to ensure these students are engaging with the institution, which should lead to increased retention. Faculty and advisors can be provided with ways to seek and interact with these students so the students feel they matter and are not being discriminated against.

There are a few potentially negative outcomes if more attention is not brought to the lack of Black faculty on university campuses. Black students will not see people who look like them and may not aspire to be faculty, perpetuating the lack of Black faculty. Black students may not feel safe, find their fit, or obtain proper support, which may continue to decrease retention and graduation rates. This study brings light to the issues Black students face and encourages connecting Black faculty with these students in more intentional ways, as well as increasing the number of Black faculty on campus.

**Purpose/Intervention Statement**

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to examine Black students’ experiences in relation to Black faculty at a private PWI in the mid-Atlantic part of the country. Black students’ experience at a PWI is generally defined as how the presence or lack of presence of Black faculty impacts students’ engagement and retention at a university. The information gathered in the research process supports the importance of increasing the number of Black faculty hired at PWIs and connecting them to the Black student population.

**Justification**

This issue matters because Black college students are not retained and do not graduate at the same rates as White students. The underrepresentation of Black students at PWIs continues to be a challenge due to their negative experiences and instances of racism, which may be attributed
to the historical narrative that Black people are intellectually inferior (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Black students at PWIs have had to overcome tough obstacles; even though PWIs have created programs to engage and retain Black students, there are still questions about whether these initiatives address issues of identity and institutionalized racism (Love, 1993).

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework that examines how race and power are treated in society and culture, especially for individuals from oppressed backgrounds. CRT has been used within educational research to challenge and examine the notion that students of color are deficient, the idea that they are accountable for their own academic failures, and policies affecting Black students in higher education (Harper et al., 2009; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). This study adds to the current research by beginning to examine the impact that the presence or lack of presence of Black faculty on campus have on the Black students’ experiences at PWIs.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

The participants at the university selected as the research site have unique backgrounds. First, they must declare their major upon admission into the university, unlike other schools that may give them one or two years to declare a major. This process can be a challenge for students because they do not have significant time to explore different majors. While the university provides resources to help students determine the best academic fit, there is a time constraint to make changes that will not prolong the date of graduation. Second, the university is a cooperative educational institution; students in most of the programs have one to three six-month experiences in the working world. These students are exposed to different aspects of their chosen careers before they graduate, which is not common to most university programs. Thus, the context in which these students may seek relationships with Black faculty may be different from the contexts discussed in the existing literature on this topic.
Significance and Context

For decades, research studies have questioned why students leave higher education (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Herzog, 2005; Tinto, 1975). Research has provided some reasons for why Black students leave, including a lack of engagement (Schreiner & Nelson, 2013; Tinto, 1975; Tobolowsky, 2008), lack of financial aid funding (Goldrick-Rab, Kelchen, Harris, & Benson, 2016), and an unwelcome campus climate and racial discrimination (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper et al., 2009; Hiraldo, 2010). It is important to put these solutions to these problems into action to engage and retain Black students.

The impact of Black students being disengaged from campus life is that they will continue to leave college at high rates. Diversity can be cultivated in the classroom specifically and in learning overall. Institutions should incorporate a curriculum that discusses race and introduces diversity courses in the first year as a way to familiarize students with concepts of discrimination and stereotypes (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Patton, McEwen, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). Faculty and administrators should also be aware of their own identities and evaluate their understanding of race and racism (Patton et al., 2007). Black students may continue to feel marginalized and as if their voices are not being heard. Creating safe spaces is also key because it allows students to form their identities and share openly with students of similar backgrounds (Doan, 2015).

Action or resolution may result in improved student satisfaction, which may increase the likelihood of Black students being retained. Such resolutions include engaging with faculty around professional development and creating a campus climate that cultivates sense of belonging and pride (Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). Faculty and staff will benefit from training on cultural sensitivity. Additionally, increasing need-based aid for students may increase the
likelihood that they are retained (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). Storytelling, a key component of CRT, not only helps assess the campus climate, but also can provide an opportunity for further research so institutions can determine how to be more inclusive (Hiraldo, 2010).

Having students engage with faculty who look like them may also give these students hope that becoming a faculty member is a possibility. Black students do not aspire to be faculty because they do not see themselves represented in that profession. If they see someone who looks like them in a faculty position, regardless of discipline, their career aspirations may change. As will be discussed later, Generation Z consists of a group of students who want more flexibility and ability to create change. They can do that in faculty positions, but if they are not taught to think across disciplines, they may miss out on this opportunity.

**Positionality**

Becoming and being a scholar-practitioner starts with my positionality and identity. I identify as a first-generation Black female scholar who graduated from a PWI. It is my identity which is the reason behind me conducting this research. I subscribe to the argument that Briscoe (2005) and Parsons (2008) highlight, stating that Black people should conduct Black research to maintain the integrity of the Black experience. In my professional role, one of my responsibilities is to manage a mentoring program that connects students of color with professional faculty and staff, regardless of the faculty and staff members’ races and ethnicities. My preference is to match students with faculty and staff of color; unfortunately, the low number of staff and faculty of color makes that impossible.

**Identities**

The themes explored as a part of my journey to becoming a scholar-practitioner include my identity and positionality, as well as that of this study’s participants; the oppression and
marginalization of Black students; and the proposed pedagogy and aim of education to understand what keeps students or causes them to leave an institution of higher education. As individuals, we strive to find a sense of self through the process of research in addition to our everyday work (Nganga, 2011). I hope to bring emotional intelligence to the storytelling process to increase awareness and perceptions of the Black student experience (hooks, 2010).

To continue growing as a scholar-practitioner, it is important to evolve and continue engaging in dialogue within the broad world of education (hooks, 1994). Education has given me an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a scholar-practitioner and how that role integrates with my daily professional life and interactions with students. Engaging in the present scholarship has further developed relationships maintained with faculty through conversations around teaching and learning. Two important goals of being a scholar-practitioner are to improve program effectiveness and utilize data-driven decision-making (Kupo, 2014).

Exploring Bias

The research presented here is based in part on my experience as a Black student at a PWI, as well as my goal of finding a way to improve that experience for other students with a similar identity. Understanding one’s positionality is important to recognizing how they may be portrayed to others. There is an overlap between identity and oppression for me as a scholar-practitioner.

Black people sometimes take on second personas. There may be a divide between our personas we show at home and those we demonstrate in the professional or educational world (Franklin, 2014). Black identities are hidden to fit in with the majority and keep from standing out (hooks, 1992). As a practitioner, I push parts of my identity into the background so I assimilate better into the work environment. I also recognize that my role as a scholar of color
and position at the research site may have impacted study participants’ perception of me as being powerful. While power dynamics may happen naturally, I was careful to remain aware of that possible perception while conducting the study and remain clear about my own positionality (Mockler, 2014).

It was important for me to be able to step back and compartmentalize my experiences from those of students who were potential research participants. To address my own biases and ensure that I presented the study accurately, I compartmentalized any stereotypes about the history of White people, their power, and the marginalization of minority groups (Banks, 2007). I overcame this challenge as a scholar-practitioner by strengthening my own values and establishing a set of beliefs that aligned with my values through reading and speaking with other faculty and staff in higher education (Brown, 2004).

I also recognized that the power I have sometimes exists only to myself or a few people outside of my direct organization. Due to a departmental reorganization several years ago, I took on more responsibility, utilizing the assets model of multiculturalism to take a negative experience and turn it into a positive one (Takacs, 2002). I currently attend meetings that include everyone from vice presidents to program coordinators, and they range in racial and gender diversity. I am often “one of” few people of color present and have been forced to take on the role of representative for issues having to do with race. In meetings, I observe and listen to understand and create thoughtful dialogue, always hoping that the infrequent moments when I infrequently speak will be taken seriously (hooks, 2010; Takacs, 2002). I believe trying to create an open dialogue allows everyone to share their viewpoints, but unfortunately, that goal is not often accomplished (Franklin, 2014; Takacs, 2002). Throughout the active research process, it was important for me to remain flexible but clear on the role I possessed at any given time.
Jacobs (2016) mentions in her research that she found herself shifting from the role of researcher to facilitator and educator, even serving as an ally in the discussion groups she conducted with Black girls. While I experienced that shift as a practitioner, I was mindful that it did not interfere with the research.

My positionality as a scholar-practitioner continued to develop as the research process progressed. I utilized the research to improve Black students’ current engagement and programming at the research site, the institution where I work. I believe that as a Black educator, I have a responsibility to encourage Black and other minority students to see and think beyond their own thoughts and perceptions (Birky, Chazan, & Morris, 2013). As a researcher, I remained aware that every action I took during the study held potential implications for myself and others (Jenlink, 2014).

I focused on what I wanted to accomplish as a result of this study, but did not frame it in reaction to how it might impact students. I would like to be known as someone who gives voice to Black students at a PWI, someone who has helped them find their fit, explore beyond their comfort zones, and experience the most that higher education has to offer. I want to continue building relationships with my students, but also with university administrators so that they better understand the Black student experience and can support whatever efforts are needed to retain this population. I want university administrators to stop looking at Black students based on their assumed deficits and start looking at them as scholars of excellence who should be seen as more than just the color of their skin as a way to show off the university’s diversity. I believe my research can begin this conversation with administrators and can gain support and funding to work closely with Black students.
Research Question

CRT assisted in the development of a research question because Black students’ experiences may serve as the basis for triggering change to increase the number of Black faculty, or at least this population’s ability to interact with each other and others more freely. The tenets of CRT created a structure that showed the challenges Black students face in the classroom at the PWI that served as the research site, as well as the need for them to be supported in their academic endeavors by connecting them to opportunities in which they can see themselves as professionals and faculty. The following qualitative research question framed this study:

- How do Black students at a PWI perceive their experiences with Black faculty?

The following sub-question helped narrow the study’s focus:

  - What are the challenges and rewards for Black students engaging with Black faculty?

Critical Race Theory

CRT is a “collection of activist and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3). CRT questions the foundations of liberal order, such as equality theory, legal reasoning, and constitutional law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In the present study, CRT allowed Black student participants to tell their stories and highlight some of the discriminations and challenges they have experienced at a PWI because of their race and ethnicity.

CRT emerged in the 1970s from the critical legal studies (CLS) field, which had been established by a group of lawyers who felt that progress gained during the civil rights movement in the 1960s had stalled and had begun to revert (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT draws on historical figures such as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and W.E.B. DuBois, as well as the Black Power movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and
Richard Delgado, early CLS writers, helped create the foundation for CRT. Numerous contemporary scholars have applied CRT and have become the foundation for current studies, most notably Gloria Ladson-Billing with William Tate, Tara Yosso, Mari Matsuda, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Daniel Solorzano.

CRT was developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) with a lens toward K-12 education. In discussing CRT and education, they note that Blacks internalize stereotypical images that society constructs to maintain power that White people possess. Including multicultural education in the curriculum is a concern, as CRT sees curriculum as an artifact designed to maintain the dominance of Whiteness. Black people’s stories are muted when they challenge authority and power (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Crenshaw (1988) notes that the challenge of colorblindness in discussions on race forces students of color to ignore their history and identity. Once they are allowed to discuss their race in a relevant context, they sometimes face being ignored by other students, further minimizing their experiences.

Deficit thinking blames Black students for their lack of progress. Matsuda (1995) feels that work in education should develop pedagogy and curriculum with the goal of eliminating racism and subordination in education (Solorzano, 1997). Solorzano (1997) recommends challenging racism and stereotypes in classrooms by engaging in discussions and analysis of racism, identifying racist stereotypes in media, highlighting the justification of attitudes and behaviors toward Black students, and finding examples that challenge existing racial stereotypes (Solorzano, 1997).

**Counterarguments**

As much support as CRT has, there are just as many arguments against it. Kennedy (1989) takes issue with the idea that scholars of color speak in a unique voice about racial issues.
He believes there is a failure to examine their circumstances; therefore, they portray themselves as victims when there is no proof that better treatment is deserved (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Kennedy (1989) expresses that Bell’s (1987) and Delgado’s (1985) writings fail to support their claims about racial exclusion, and he disputes claims that scholars of color should produce a racially supportive brand of scholarship. In addition, Farber and Sherry (1997) do not believe society is against Black people’s progress, believing instead that CRT theorists are hiding behind their personal stories as a way to advance their own agendas while ignoring traditional truth and merit (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

There has also been internal critique among critical race theorists. In one instance, there is an accusation that the movement has shifted from materialist roots and has moved toward matters that concern more middle-class than lower-class Black people, such as microaggressions and affirmative action in higher education. Another concern is that CRT has become too concerned with identity instead of social analysis (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

**Contemporary Scholars**

Many researchers have applied CRT to higher education. Harper et al. (2009) use CRT because it provides a lens to “question, critique, and challenge (p. 309)” how the ideals of racism have impacted the efforts of people of color in higher education. CRT has also been used within educational research to challenge the notion that Black students are deficient and accountable for their own academic failures, as well as in examining policies that affect Black students in higher education (Harper et al., 2009; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012).

Black students’ cultural experiences at PWIs are often defined by their interactions with individuals who have the same traditions, values, and beliefs. Unfortunately, little has been done to incorporate race into theories, causing a disconnect between cultures and learners’ experiences
with the institutions they attend (Berry & Candis, 2013; Patton et al., 2007). To create a campus environment where everyone feels validated by their experiences, people of color must be moved to the center of the conversations (Patton et al., 2007).

Racism, which CRT views as normal in American society, is perpetuated by negative stereotypes of Black students, which causes faculty members to have low expectations for them (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). These perceptions on campus lead to students not seeking assistance even when they truly need it to improve their grades. It also causes them not to participate in class discussions for fear of being perceived as conforming to negative stereotypes; this phenomenon is known as stereotype threat (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). Stereotypes against Black students in higher education can disrupt education and are used to justify racism and feelings of marginalization because there is a general belief that these students do not value education (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012).

**Tenets of CRT**

The most commonly identified tenets of CRT included the notions of racism as ordinary, a unique voice of color/storytelling, interest-convergence, Whiteness as property, and a critique of liberalism. An additional tenet that researchers do not identify as consistently is revisionist history (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Racism is ordinary and permanent. Because of its presence in society, it is natural to people and takes on both individual and institutional forms (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano, 1997). In the same way that sarcastic comments hold an element of truth for what an individual is feeling, microaggressions can highlight individuals’ misconceptions and stereotypical thoughts.
The unique voice of people of color through storytelling expresses the experience of oppressed people (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Storytelling provides an opportunity to communicate Black people’s lived experiences so their voices can effect change and improve support in education, as well as potentially help White people gain a better understanding of the Black experience.

Bell (1995a) defines interest-convergence as a phenomenon that occurs when Blacks receive favorable judicial decisions to the extent that their interests coincide with White people’s interests (Driver, 2011). Hiraldo (2010) provides an accurate example of interest-convergence as it relates to higher education by highlighting the recruitment process at PWIs that target Black students who can afford college as a way for universities to increase diversity and claim to maintain a diverse campus but do not provide support once students of color arrive.

The critique of liberalism challenges the tradition of colorblindness and race neutrality (Solorzano, 1997). Colorblindness leads to misconceptions about racial equality, addresses blatant forms of oppression, and hides nuanced racism (Harper et al., 2009).

The Whiteness as property tenet means that Whites are the primary beneficiary of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It highlights the idea of White supremacy because it is a privilege only White people can have. Most Blacks who earn a PhD in education tend to take on administrative rather than faculty roles; therefore, they are not engaged in curriculum and pedagogy, which remains in the ownership of White professors (Hiraldo, 2010).

Revisionist history demonstrates how Whites have a tendency to reexamine or rewrite history to replace uncomfortable events with ones believed to more accurately portray Black people’s experiences as Whites see them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harper et al., 2009).
The foundation of the approach used in the present study is to use storytelling to share Black students’ voices and lived experiences. The tenets that racism is normal, Whiteness maintains property, and liberalism should be critiqued were used in some of the interview questions. The other two tenets of CRT, revisionist history and interest-convergence, were also revealed in participants’ stories.

**Synthesis**

The goal of this research was to highlight the need for more Black faculty and to understand that Black students at PWIs need increased support on campus. Black faculty must be supported, as well, and made visible to Black students on campus. They often teach in programs where Black students are not as well-represented, but sometimes Black students just want to see someone who looks like them in a leadership role on campus. The main limitation of using CRT theory for this research was that it provided a one-sided view, looking at the issue of diversity on campus at a PWI from the perspective of Black people. In the future, it may be interesting to perform a comparative analysis of Black and White students’ experiences in the classroom. Another area for future research may be to interview Black faculty for their perspectives on the issue.

**Methods**

IPA was utilized as the qualitative methodology for this study. CRT’s tenets create a structure that shows the challenges Black students face at a PWI, as well as their need for support in their academic endeavors by connecting with Black faculty and other leadership opportunities in which they can see themselves. IPA aligned well with the study’s goals to share Black students’ stories, which provided evidence of lower retention and graduation rates among this population.
Audience and Stakeholders

This work speaks to university administrators so they can understand the potential impact of Black faculty mentorship on Black students. There is space for reciprocity in this project by doing a larger case study and looking at the issue from Black faculty members’ viewpoints. The desired outcomes of speaking to this audience include hiring more Black faculty across areas in which they are not well-represented and ensuring these faculty are able to engage and connect with Black students.

Conclusion/Forward

The engagement and retention of Black students at PWIs should be a priority for most institutions. While the reasons vary between institutions, there are general practices and policies that can be put into place to ensure this goal can be met. An important component to understanding the connection Black students have with a PWI campus is to understand their relationship with Black faculty and how they experience the campus.

This research investigated student perspectives on how a lack of Black faculty at a PWI impacted their engagement with the university. Using a qualitative approach, CRT was used as the framework and IPA was utilized to discuss findings from the participant interviews.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Understanding the impact the presence of Black faculty at a PWI may have on Black students is critically important. If there is a lack of Black faculty on a college campus, Black students may leave, remain disengaged from campus life, or experience an overall lack of satisfaction with their college experience. Black faculty have the power to serve as mentors and role models for Black students so these students can see what is possible for themselves. The question explored in this study centered on how Black students perceived their experiences with Black faculty at a PWI. Using CRT, this question was answered with an emphasis on the tenets of Whiteness as property, storytelling, and racism as ordinary.

This chapter explores current research about Black students at PWIs and, more specifically, these students’ engagement and retention trends, identity formation, and experiences with campus climate. A brief discussion of the historical context and current national news is provided as the backdrop for the study.

Historical Context

The history of Black people in America has been tenuous, and Blacks continue to struggle to maintain the same rights and privileges as Whites. DuBois (1903) famously stated that Black people in the south wanted to be equal, integrate with others, and receive the same treatment as freed Black people in the north. However, the struggle for Black people to obtain equal rights led to their compromising and unfortunately risking their civil rights. Booker T. Washington stated that survival came from submission, and he asked Black people to give up their political power, desire for civil rights, and desire to educate their youth (DuBois, 1903). As
a result, Black people became marginalized, were treated as inferior, and saw decreased funding for institutions that served to educate Black people (DuBois, 1903).

Black faculty members experiences’ in academia began at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), schools that were first established in the north before the start of the Civil War as a result of discrimination and White people’s resistance to Black people’s educational advancement (Jackson, 2002). Following the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, availability of education for freed slaves became a concern. The American Missionary Association (AMA), Black churches, the Freedman’s Bureau, and private philanthropists began to develop educational systems for Blacks’ educational advancement (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertand, 2001). HBCUs’ early curriculum was influenced by W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, bringing together industrial and liberal arts courses. DuBois argued that education should develop an elite group, the talented tenth, to be leaders. In contrast, Washington felt that vocational training was in Black people’s best interest because it would help them develop skills to become manual laborers, jobs White people supported for Blacks (Brown et al., 2001; Jackson, 2002).

HBCUs were founded and still exist today to empower and prepare Black students to succeed in a sometimes-hostile society, providing a safe space for them. There are 103 HBCUs in the United States, mostly situated in the south and the border states (Brown et al., 2001). They award about one-third of all bachelor’s degrees earned by Blacks, and 75% of HBCU graduates go on to earn their PhDs (Brown et al., 2001; Jackson, 2002). The research has noted many high-achieving officials who graduated from HBCUs; for example, in the early 1990s, 80% of Black federal judges were HBCU graduates (Jackson, 2002). In 2000, the National Science Foundation found that only six percent of PhDs had been awarded to Black graduates, with 40%
of those students earning doctorates in education (EdDs). With so few Black students earning PhDs, Baby Boomers retiring, and the graying of Black faculty, the question remains as to who will fill empty academic positions, particularly at HBCUs. In addition, PWIs are able to present more competitive recruitment packages for new faculty, shifting the talent pool away from HBCUs.

Historically, education in America was for the elite. In 1954, the College Board began to provide funds for low-income students and students of color as part of the College Scholarship Service (Fuller, 2014). In the mid-1960s, two legislative acts opened up higher education significantly for Black students. The first, the Civil Rights Act, passed in 1964; this act made discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin illegal, and it effectively desegregated public education (U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, 2018). The following year, the Higher Education Act of 1965 was passed and served as another turning point in higher education history in America (Fuller, 2014).

Originally called the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (BEOG), the Pell grant was created in 1972 as an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965. It was renamed in 1980 after Senator Claiborne Pell from Rhode Island, who was a fierce advocate for ensuring that socioeconomic status was not a hindrance to people seeking to obtain a college degree (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). The goal of the Pell grant, first awarded in 1973, was to meet low-income students’ financial need so they would not have to take out loans to attend college (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). BEOG was meant to provide a minimum level of resources to ensure access, and campus-based programs like work-study would supplement aid (Kingkade, 2012).

Another turning point in Blacks’ entrance into higher education was the case of James Meredith at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) in 1962. His application was originally
accepted until the university learned of his race and withdrew his application. He filed a lawsuit with the assistance of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the US Supreme Court ruled in his favor (Cohodas, 1997). The university and surrounding communities rioted and protested his admission. The situation escalated to the point where President Kennedy called in several hundred members of the National Guard to protect Meredith, who was accepted by some of the White students, but harassed and isolated by many others. Meredith is credited as being the first Black person to enroll at Ole Miss.

The research site for the present study was founded in the 1890s in the center of a major city. Its first Black student graduated in 1900; he came from the Tuskegee Institute and was recommended to attend by Booker T. Washington. He graduated with a degree in architectural drawing. In recent years, the Black student population has celebrated this student by holding a special graduation event for students of African descent. This event not only brings together Black students, but also Black faculty and staff. For many of the participants, it is the first time they see other Black students, faculty, and staff outside of their majors.

Based on the 2010 Census, in the urban area surrounding the institution, 44% of the total population is Black, with Whites making up 42%. During the 2016-2017 school year, 11,658 students graduated from public high schools in the region, and only 22.5% were college-bound. At the research site, during the 2017-2018 school year, 5.9% of first-year students were Black, and of those students, one-quarter were from the city around the research site.

National six-year graduation rates are 53% (Allen et al., 2008). The reasons for these low numbers vary, but one is students’ socioeconomic status and the lack of financial aid (Allen, 1999; Allen et al., 2008). Students who are not connected to their institution also demonstrate a higher rate of leaving (Allen et al., 2008). Students’ grade-point-averages (GPAs), especially
during their first year of study, is also a significant predictor of success in some statistical models (Kiser & Price, 2008).

A few racially motivated instances have occurred recently at the research site. The student body has not been known to protest openly on campus, but they do use social media to share their thoughts. In 2014, a White student posted a message on Instagram in response to Black History Month, in which she questioned who would “plough the fields” and stated her hope that all students of African American descent enjoyed the shortest month of the year. There were many responses to the post, and a few Black students made a YouTube video addressing the issue, with just over 1,300 views.

Nationally, student protests have continued to challenge PWIs in general. In the fall of 2014, an incident quickly escalated at the University of Missouri after White students yelled racial epithets at Black students on more than one occasion. The Black students protested that the administration did not do anything to address their concerns. Their protests included a list of demands for change at the university, in addition to the removal of university president Tim Wolfe, who resigned in November 2014 (Pearson, 2015).

Racial profiling on college campuses has also gained national attention. In the past year, there have been several occasions when Black students at an institution were targeted as outsiders and had the police called on them. One was a Black graduate student at Yale who fell asleep in the common area of a residence hall; another student, thinking she did not belong there, called campus security. Another incident occurred at Smith College, where a student was eating lunch outside and was assumed to be in the wrong place, so campus security was called.

While legally, Black students are accepted into universities, the climate of the country remains socially unwelcoming and closed to this population. Institutions must provide better
training and guidance to prevent racial profiling and maintain a safe space for all students. The underrepresentation of Black students at PWIs continues to be a challenge, in part because Black students have negative experiences of racism, which may be attributed to the historical belief that people of color were intellectually inferior (Harper et al., 2009). Multicultural education can sometimes operate on a deficits model, in which the negatives or weaknesses are dominant.

**Black Faculty**

Once a Black person decides to become a faculty member, one challenge is where they can and will do so. PWIs usually offer more competitive employment packages than HBCUs. Jackson (2002) provides an example, highlighting the workload challenge of a Black faculty member who received an offer from a HBCU to teach four classes per semester, versus a nearby PWI where the professor may only need to teach two or three classes per semester. Black faculty members must consider a tradeoff as to whether they would rather have a smaller workload in a mostly White male-dominated environment or a heavier workload in a more supportive environment. HBCUs may also lose out to PWIs in regard to providing extra funding to faculty members for conference travel and research (Jackson, 2002).

Only about 19 HBCUs offer PhD and EdD programs. If more HBCUs offered terminal degrees, they may see an increase in the number of Black people earning doctorates, and thus increase the probability of more people of color entering the professoriate (Jackson, 2002).

Faculty of color experience stress related to time constraints and promotion. Time constraint stress is typically related to conducting research, earning lower salaries, creating new courses, and working in private institutions (Thompson & Dey, 1998). Faculty experience less of this stress at two-year institutions, but they experience more stress if they are women. Women of color are more susceptible to stress around promotion and the effects of marginality. They
experience more instances of sexual harassment and encounter assaults on their identity regularly. For single women, marginality is sometimes heightened by distance from family. Additional challenges faced by women of color include maintaining integrity of their research interests and finding publishing sources that can be invalidated when promotion decisions are being made (Thompson & Dey, 1998). Women of color must adapt to institutional behaviors by using switching techniques to balance between their two worlds (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

**Experiences at a PWI**

Prior to the dismantling of Jim Crow in the 1960s, Black faculty taught at HBCUs. After this point, new opportunities opened up at PWIs for Black faculty (Weems, 2003). Still, in 2008, just 5.5% of full-time faculty at degree-granting institutions were Black. The lack of Black faculty at PWIs can perpetuate the false stereotype that they do not succeed in higher education (Patton & Catching, 2009). Black faculty tend to feel more stress, are held to higher standards, and are not acknowledged when they do extra work (Patton & Catching, 2009; Stanley, 2006). They are able use this oppression to effect change through strength because they are aware of how they are viewed by others (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Griffin and Reddick’s (2011) study on the influence of race and gender experienced by Black faculty at a PWI discusses the concept of “Black tax” and the expectation that Black faculty must meet with students more than White faculty because of the need for their wisdom and attention. Female faculty similarly experienced an additional “gender tax” (Griffin & Reddick, 2011). Black female faculty note the time cost of attending to students’ issues and not getting to other work. Faculty also note their positive impact on student retention, but their efforts are not supported or valued by leadership (Griffin & Reddick, 2011).
The more stress faculty of color experience, the less satisfied they are, regardless of motivation and feeling challenged by work. They also experience feeling less collegial with other staff on campus (Thompson & Dey, 1998). Black faculty experience barriers at PWIs, including lack of mentorship and not understanding how to navigate the university landscape (Patton & Catching, 2009). They also experience microaggressions and racial profiling. In Patton and Catching’s (2009) study, they note how Black faculty can be racially profiled because they may see things through a more racial lens; thus, they may be seen as not being able to understand that their experiences are not unique but shared by all faculty, further creating a gap in the role that race plays educating students.

Weems (2003) conducted a study about Black faculty members’ experiences at the University of Missouri – Columbus (MU) and found they mirrored that of many Black faculty at similar institutions. The findings concluded that Black students wanted to increase the number of Black faculty, which could help facilitate the implementation and continuance of a Black studies program. Weems (2003) notes that at MU, some departments have no Black faculty and the few that do tend not to be hospitable toward the development of Black faculty. A task force was created in 1998 and set forth a list of recommendations that may be relevant at other institutions. They include creating communication for new faculty hires that clearly states expectations for teaching, research, and other requirements for the tenure process, as well as providing training for all department leads to ensure they promote the goal of a more diverse faculty pool (Weems, 2003).

**Campus Climate**

Enrolling in a PWI can be a culture shock for Black students who may not have had a diverse experience prior to college. It may be the first time they experience microaggressions and
the phenomenon of being “one of” in the classroom (McCoy, 2014). It is important to connect Black students quickly with each other through programs for diverse populations or the multicultural center on campus to “normalize” their experiences and build a community of social support (McCoy, 2014; Ovink & Veazey, 2011; Winograd & Rust, 2014).

Knowing who these students are, where they are, and what they want was vital during the research process for the present study. The target population for this study was considered Generation Z, born in the age of technology between 1996 and 2012. They prefer online socialization over face-to-face interactions. They are also independent self-starters who want to design their own programs in college and learn about entrepreneurship so they can work for themselves and make their own schedules. Schwieger and Ladwig (2018) note the following additional relevant characteristics for Generation Z: an emphasis on the importance of higher education as a way to reach their goals and the belief that college should provide professional experience. While these markers do not distinguish between race, storytelling and hearing their peers’ stories is important to this generation, which connects directly with this research (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

Considering that Generation Z came of age while Barack Obama was president, 70% of young people have more favorable opinions of Obama than they do of Donald Trump. Broken down by race, 96% of young Black people view Obama more favorably, while only 59% of young White people do. The approval ratings for Obama decrease drastically among young White men (Jones, Cox, Fisch-Friedman, & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2018).

The Public Religion Research Institute, in conjunction with MTV, released a study in early 2018 looking at the state of young America as it related to diversity and discrimination. One of their findings was that young people, regardless of ethnicity, had more conversations than
older adults about discrimination and bias, citing race relations as a serious issue to them. Young people believe racial minorities experience more discrimination than their White counterparts in America. Almost two-thirds of the population believe that Black people are portrayed by the media in a way that feeds negative stereotypes (Jones et al., 2018).

Johnson-Ahorlu (2012) states that “racism is a system of oppression and stereotypes are the rationale for such oppression” (p. 637). When racism and stereotypes come together, they have the power to disrupt the education system for students of color. University administrators and faculty have the ability to create change. Thus, it is important for them to understand their own identities and how these identities influence their interactions with others before they can question and challenge those perspectives (Berry & Candis, 2013; Patton et al., 2007).

There are several ways in which the principles of CRT can be infused on campuses. Faculty and staff must be open to moving past racism and build programs and services that incorporate race in a positive way (Patton et al., 2007). Faculty can be more supportive when they witness students facing racism, as well as provide support to ensure students are academically successful (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). Universities must be realistic in their approach to proactively and comprehensively address racial inequalities in higher education (Harper et al., 2009). To engage students, faculty may consider adding elements of pop culture into the classroom, which may help students share their lived experiences and connect them to the curriculum, thereby creating a more engaged pedagogy (Berry & Candis, 2013).

Race is a key factor in the climate of a campus. The university environment should encourage and foster inclusiveness through support systems, safe spaces, and education and training for faculty and staff. Black students are more likely to succeed if there are individuals on campus with whom they can connect and who value their achievements and validate their
cultural heritage (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Faculty and staff can participate in psychoeducational training to assist them in understanding the factors that determine student persistence (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999). Greer and Chwalisz (2007) found that improving campus climate along with race relations is a necessity at PWIs. Creating a sense of belonging on campus for Black students in addition to support systems and positive interactions with faculty and staff are ways institutions can begin to improve the environment (Love, 1993; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). Introducing students in their first year to diversity education through courses and campus programming may also be beneficial (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007).

In his study, Doan (2015) found that students of color at a PWI experienced more harassment and found the climate to be more racist. This perception of racism can trigger students to feel more stressors interpersonally and environmentally, and it can also put them at risk for potentially detrimental outcomes related to their academic, social, and psychological health (Doan, 2015; Greer & Chwalisz, 2007). Coping strategies may not resolve these stressors for Black students because their status as a minority unfortunately contributes to the overall stress and difficulties they experience as college students; instead, they may resort to avoidance strategies to cope (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007).

Researchers hold different beliefs about the college experiences Black students want. Doan (2015) claims that students value the ability to connect with peers from diverse backgrounds because it can enhance their learning in and out of the classroom. Love (1993), on the other hand, found that Black students expressed a more positive attitude when they lived on dormitory floors containing just Black residents.

Universities can assess campus climate to understand the perceptions on their unique campuses. Studies have shown generally that Black students have different experiences and
perceptions of campus climate than do White students (Doan, 2015; Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

**Faculty and the Classroom**

A supportive environment created by faculty and staff can have an impact on student persistence, especially for Black students. This positive environment could be fostered by counseling and coaching to promote healthy self-esteem and a positive sense of racial identity. A student’s beliefs and perceptions about the university environment are strong factors in their decision to persist. An academic environment that promotes support of racial groups could improve cultural relationships between students and staff, increase students’ self-esteem, and improve students’ overall persistence (Gloria et al., 1999; Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013). Students of color at a PWI are more aware of their “differentness,” making their racial identity a more central focus (Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013). Those who made the decision to stay in school were motivated largely by their precollege involvement and greater social support from family and friends (Allen, 1999; Gloria et al., 1999). More attention should be given to what happens in the classroom and the student experience and social support in and out of the classroom as part of the student persistence process (Allen, 1999; Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000).

Enhancing educational diversity is an important component in the classroom, and programming can encourage those opportunities for engagement. Faculty have the power to create pedagogy that can foster a more active learning environment and critical thinking through engagement and participation (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Franklin (2014) and hooks (1994) believe the classroom should be exciting, so they deconstruct the traditional notion of a classroom and teach concepts out of the prescribed order to increase critical thinking. As stated
by Godowski (2015) Baxter Magolda’s (2001) theory of self-authorship can help students develop a narrative-based approach to their strengths. The steps to self-authorship include following formulas or focusing on the superficial, reaching a crossroads or acceptance of dominance, becoming the author of one’s own life or viewing things in a multidimensional way, and gaining internal freedom or clarity of thought (Godowski, 2015).

White faculty can be dismissive of Black students’ identities, especially racial and cultural identities (Luedke, 2017; McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, & Luedke, 2015). Black students may pick up on microaggressions and see themselves as inferior due to faculty members’ condescending attitudes. White faculty often do not engage in conversations about research and graduate school or nurture mentor relationships with Black students because they seemed uninterested. Faculty admit to treating Black students differently based on the perception that they are less prepared than their White counterparts. A colorblind approach from faculty can make students feel disempowered and uncomfortable about sharing their backgrounds, which can lead to erasing the student background or causing their assimilation (McCoy et al., 2015).

Student satisfaction can also impact their academic performance. Faculty members’ interactions with Black students is the biggest factor relating to students’ negative academic experiences. Faculty sometimes lack understanding and sensitivity about how to handle issues of racism with Black students. Students look to build trust with their professors, and if faculty are not able to stand up on the students’ behalf against issues of racism, students may feel that White faculty are not supportive or trustworthy (Cole, 2010; Love, 1993; Luedke, 2017). Black students also report that White faculty sometimes ignore them in the classroom, where they either exhibit their racist beliefs or shut the students out of campus life (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012; Love, 1993). Black students feel faculty do not believe in them and even discourage them from their interest in
pursuing more rigorous coursework or graduate studies (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). Faculty can be trained to discuss issues of diversity in the classroom so they can become actively engaged with concerns about race and ethnicity on campus (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013).

Engaging with students can also be a challenge. Receiving advice and criticism from faculty showed the most significant impact on students’ academic performance (Cole, 2010). Cole (2010) found that if students felt the feedback and critique they received was honest, especially in regard to writing skills, it had a positive impact on students’ academic performance. However, the results were different for minority students, whose performance was impacted negatively by engagement with faculty (Cole, 2010). One potentially related issue noted by Black faculty is the idea of reciprocity. Students seek advice or counsel from Black faculty and then do not try as hard in class, expecting faculty to give them a break (Griffin, 2013).

There is a need to create engaging learning experiences and ethnically diverse social support so all students can succeed in college. Faculty can support service-learning projects, undergraduate research, and learning communities (Gloria et al., 1999; Sweat, Jones, Han, & Wolfgram, 2013). About 80% of Black students reported at least one faculty or staff who had supported them academically and in turn had contributed to their academic success (Gloria et al., 1999). Connection with others is important for motivating students to engage in learning behaviors (Sweat et al., 2013).

Natoli, Jackling, and Siddique (2015) conducted a qualitative study to determine what influences students to be engaged and linked this information to previous research on why students left college early. They found that students are more engaged when there is familiarity in the classroom and faculty address them by their names. Instructors who are knowledgeable
about the subject matter being discussed and reply in a timely manner to communication also facilitate students’ engagement and increase their satisfaction level. Negative experiences in the classroom include teachers whose first language is not English restricting the opportunity for adequate interaction with students. Peer interaction and groupwork are also frustrating for students because of the lack of support from faculty and a lack of accountability from team members (Natoli et al., 2015).

Professional development is also important. It can influence both pedagogy and curriculum, and the connection between the two can highlight teaching and learning experiences (Morewood, Ankrum, & Bean, 2010). To understand pedagogy development for multicultural education, scholar-practitioners should understand the critical conversations that must happen in Student Affairs, like space and support, and explore opportunities for critical thinking and engagement on a multicultural level (Kupo, 2014).

Safe Spaces

Feeling safe and having safe spaces on campus are important to create a positive campus climate for Black students. The presence of Black faculty and staff can create a more comfortable climate in which students can interact with and find these safe spaces (Doan, 2015). Campuses can also create an inclusive campus environment by creating and building a multicultural student center and highlighting ethnic student organizations (Doan, 2015). When students do not feel safe or welcome due to racism, they can become marginalized (Love, 1993; Patton et al., 2007). Creating a safe campus climate can ensure that Black students understand the institution takes their academic success seriously (Doan, 2015).

Black faculty can provide a space for Black students to be authentic by sharing similar feelings of frustration (Reddick, 2011). This relationship can be developed from faculty
members’ past experiences as protégés (Griffin, 2012). While mentoring is important for Black students, time is a challenge that Black faculty face in deciding how to balance their time for mentoring (Reddick, 2011). Mentoring should be considered more than just one behavior, but a more general concept that serves as an umbrella for various activities (Griffin, 2012).

Learning centers and multicultural centers on campus also play an important role in offering programming for the diverse student population. These centers can offer culturally responsive tutoring and validate the diversity of student backgrounds (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Universities should consider the expectations and values students place on staying connected to their home communities, then increase the connections for diverse students to facilitate their success and help them fulfill their expectations (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Not clinging to the dominant culture and embracing a CRT perspective is an important step in creating spaces for safe dialogue, reducing microaggressions on campus, and moving toward understanding the intricacies of multiple races on a college campus (Patton et al., 2007).

**Identity**

Individuals’ identities are defined by the connections they have to beliefs, traditions, and values. Identity is seen as a dynamic construct in that the experiences a person has can change the way he or she identifies him or herself (Berry & Candis, 2013). Identity is much more than what is on the surface and can be seen physically. Being a Black undergraduate student at a PWI brings with it a set of challenges that may only be addressed in small ways. There may be formal sponsored programs available based on students’ majors, or there may only be student organizations available to them. Either way, it is important for Black students to feel comfortable and safe on campus.
Black students’ cultural experiences at PWIs are defined by their interactions with individuals who have the same traditions, values, and beliefs. Their cultural identities are revealed through storytelling, which honors their dominant self, a central principle of CRT (Berry & Candis, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Unfortunately, little has been done to incorporate race into theories, causing a disconnect between cultures and learners’ experiences with the institutions they attend (Berry & Candis, 2013; Patton et al., 2007). To create a campus environment where everyone feels validated by their experiences, Black people need to be moved to the center of conversations (Patton et al., 2007).

Ethnic identity development is a cyclical process altered by students’ interactions with different communities from home and on campus (Baber, 2012). Ethnic identity becomes more prevalent once Black students enter college because many Black students did not spend time prior to college thinking about or learning about their ethnic identities. Resources on campus with many staff members of color tend to facilitate students’ ethnic identity development. Maramba and Velasquez (2012) found that students’ process of learning and processing their ethnic identities through peers and support staff was helpful in the formation of both cognitive and non-cognitive factors. Toward the end of their first year, Black students began to develop more complexity around their identity, with the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Baber, 2012).

Intersectionality was first highlighted by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in her critique of feminist theory, which evolved from a White racial context and overlooks racial identity and the additional facets that comes with it. More broadly, intersectionality explores how various cultural and biological traits interact on multiple or simultaneous levels (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). While students use peers and staff to assist with their identity
development, they feel there is a lack of diversity at the university and, in some cases, the cultural center on campus is the only place that provides relevant programming and support (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012).

Black people sometimes take on a second persona. Thus, there may be a divide between the persona they show at home and the one they demonstrate in the professional or educational world (Franklin, 2014). Black identities are hidden to fit in with the majority and not stand out (hooks, 1992). Minorities tend to foreground or background their identities based on the situation. Individuals may choose to foreground their critical ideological identity over race, class, or gender identity (Briscoe, 2005). Black people may background parts of their identity to better assimilate to the school and work environments.

Payne and Suddler (2014) examined the extent to which Black students, faculty, and staff could navigate and make meaning together about their identities at a PWI. They found the interaction between students and faculty was negligible because faculty were incentivized to pursue research, which left little time for mentoring. A student’s social and academic integration is developed as part of his or her meaning-making as determined by the institution’s goals (Berger, 2002). Institutions with consistent expectations, integrity, and commitment to student welfare increases the level of social integration and student commitment (Berger, 2002; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). Leaders can be proactive in fostering organizational attributes by communicating clearly and allowing students to have a voice in the development of social rules on campus (Berger, 2002; Berger & Braxton, 1998). When students experience a sense of community on campus through positive experiences and relationships, they are more likely to persist and be academically successful (Kiser & Price, 2008; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013).
Imposter Phenomenon

The phrase *imposter phenomenon*, sometimes called *imposter syndrome*, was first used by Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Ament Imes in their 1976 study on high-achieving women. They defined *imposter phenomenon* as maintaining a “strong belief that they are not intelligent” (Clance & Imes, 1976, p. 241). Individuals who feel they are imposters think they have fooled everyone into how intelligent they are but they remain afraid that people will find out they are phonies (Clance & Imes, 1976). The characteristics and consequences most associated with imposter phenomenon include anxiety, mania and depression, and lack of self-confidence (Clance & Imes, 1976; Cokley et al., 2017). These feelings can lead to students either overworking or underperforming as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy (Ramsey & Brown, 2018). A self-perpetuating action of the imposter phenomenon includes constantly ignoring one’s true abilities.

Imposter phenomenon has been studied in relation to first-generation college students, adult students, and minority students (Ramsey & Brown, 2018). Peteet, Montgomery, and Weekes (2015) conducted a study on ethnic minority undergraduate students and found that students who had mastered navigating the university had lower feelings of being an imposter. Cokley et al. (2017) looked at imposter phenomenon in relation to mental health among underrepresented minority college students. Their study showed that imposter feelings and perceived discrimination among Black students was significantly related to depression and anxiety, exacerbating the feelings more. However, they found that imposter feelings presented a stronger negative impact on mental health. These results led to an assumption that Black students with imposter feelings may feel unprepared for college-level work, which may be heightened by
their belief that others think they should not be there, thereby increasing feelings of depression (Cokley et al., 2017).

Recommendations for helping students cope and decrease their feelings of being an imposter include increasing the number and visibility of services offered by university counseling centers (Cokley et al., 2017). As Ramsey and Brown (2018) point out, Megginson recommends that students seek out mentors who can provide positive affirmations and remind them they are not alone in their feelings. Connecting students to support and library services also present a way of modeling resilience strategies (Ramsey & Brown, 2018). Resiliency and connection to peer support is vital to Black students at PWIs. Students pull from their resiliency to persist and overcome perceptions on campus, confront the threat of stereotypes, and resist others’ judgment of them based on their racial and ethnic identities (Baber, 2012).

An additional challenge experienced by Black students at PWIs is the feeling of not fitting in. Elion et al. (2012) conducted a study to explore the idea of perfectionism and its relationship with Black students’ racial identity. They found that those students who felt they were not good enough exhibited more self-hate and maladaptive perfectionist traits. Those who were able to adapt demonstrated higher self-esteem and fewer depressive symptoms. Black students’ psychology is understood through racial identity theory, which includes the stereotype that they are intellectually inferior (Elion et al., 2012). In addition to the threat of stereotypes Black students face in college, they also risk losing support from friends and family back home due to a lack of understanding, which can lead to feelings of uncertainty as to whether a PWI is a good fit for them or not (Nadler & Komarraju, 2016).
Engagement and Retention

In 1975, Tinto developed a model that examined institution-student interactions that may result in the student dropping out. He highlighted that the process a student undergoes prior to dropping out occurs over a continuous timeline based on the interactions between the student and the institution’s social and academic culture. The student’s commitment to his or her goals is an important input factor in the model, as it provides context for his or her orientation in the college and how he or she will interact with the environment. A student’s interaction within the university environment can also continue to impact his or her goals and commitment, which can lead to either dropping out or persisting. Tinto (1975) asserts that students put their energy into activities they feel will have maximum benefits for them, and if they are not engaged with the university, they may seek connections elsewhere by leaving.

As noted by Doan (2015), Tinto’s theory of student integration highlights that when students attend college where the institutional culture does not align with their own, they detach from their own culture. How the university environment responds and reacts to students’ culture is also important to consider (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Institutions can create inclusive learning environments for diverse students to enhance their learning (Doan, 2015). Students of color begin to develop more complexity around their identity with the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Baber, 2012).

Various characteristics impact student retention, such as first-year experiences, academic profiles, and motivation. Engaging students in activities during their first year that can influence their academic success, in addition to the number of credit hours they earn, has a significant effect on persistence (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). Schreiner and Nelson (2013) found in a study that campus climate was the most significant predictor of student
persistence, and students attending their first-choice institution had a higher likelihood of persisting through their first two years. They also found that GPA and social connectedness were significant predictors of persistence (Allen et al., 2008; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). A campus climate that is welcoming and shows students that they matter can be another significant factor in whether a student stays or leaves. Institutions can show students they matter by implementing policies and practices that protect their welfare and highlight elements of collegiality (Berger, 2002), assessing students’ satisfaction with the institution, and providing academic success programs (Schreiner & Nelson, 2013).

Whether students leave due to scarce resources or the political environment of an institution is uncertain. In some situations, students may not notice the politics at play within the administration and may just assume it is part of the college experience (Berger, 2002). Berger (2002) found that campuses with more bureaucracy were more likely to have higher attrition than those with less bureaucratic tendencies. Institutions with more humanistic and collegial organizational styles tend to have a positive impact on degree attainment (Berger, 2002).

The selectivity of a university has also been attributed to attrition behaviors. Berger and Braxton (1998) used a revised version of Tinto’s interactionalist theory at highly selective private research universities and found that students at this type of university were more committed to the institution. Student commitment can be fostered by requiring them to take responsibility for their daily decisions and tasks (Kuh et al., 2008). Institutions with more prestige also have higher retention rates because the degrees they award hold greater symbolic value in society (Berger, 2002).

Participating in student life and other activities around campus impacts the student experience, as well. Astin (1999) found that involvement was a key factor in students staying at
an institution. Students who are socially connected through such activities as living on campus and using recreational facilities are also more likely to be retained, highlighting the importance of students’ interaction with their peers and feeling a sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2008; Herzog, 2005). Students who live in a residence hall have more time and opportunity to be involved on campus, thus increasing their likelihood of retention. Getting involved on campus also contributes to a student’s fit within an institution or their ability to identify with the institution (Astin, 1999). Factors that influence a student’s decision to leave include unsatisfactory interaction with others, uncertainty about goals, and fit with the institution (Kiser & Price, 2008; Tinto, 1975; Wilson, 2016).

Engagement at a PWI for Black students can begin with a summer bridge program offered by either the learning center or multicultural center (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012; McCoy, 2014). Linking a summer bridge program to a learning center is a strong predictor of students using support services on campus and helps them become acclimated to campus and overcome homesickness and emotional stress (McCoy, 2014; Winograd & Rust, 2014).

Astin (1999) developed a student development theory to help university administrators design more functional and efficient learning environments that focus more on students’ motivation within the learning process and less on what administrators do. Astin’s theory assumes there is no solitary way to approach student development, while embracing classical learning theory. The theory is useful as a framework when working with students who are struggling academically and provides a way to refocus students’ energy, requiring them to be active participants in the learning process. He believes the most valuable resource a student has is his or her time (Astin, 1999).
Astin (1999) defines resources as all the components that come together to enhance a student’s learning experience and the facilities at the institution. He believes that high-achieving students are a resource who can influence the campus environment and the learning experience for all students. Students with more frequent faculty interactions are more satisfied with their college experience (Astin, 1999). This interaction can increase students’ productivity and strengthen their competencies and self-esteem.

Utilizing services and resources increases students’ potential for retention, timeliness to graduation, and improved academic standing (Winograd & Rust, 2014). Minority-focused programs on campus can be useful in helping students navigate the university and issues they may experience (Ovink & Veazey, 2011). Students who feel comfortable on campus are more likely to seek support services. Assisting students in connecting with the university encourages them to seek help when needed and continue at the university (Brittian, Sy, & Stokes, 2009). Those who do not seek services see it as a weakness and exhibit feelings of inadequacy. To reduce the stigma of academic help-seeking, it can be reframed as educational and professional development (Winograd & Rust, 2014).

Baker (2008) looked at the influence of involvement in campus activities on Black students’ experiences. She found that for students of color, involvement in certain organizations had a positive impact, while others negatively affected their academic performance. Undergraduate research has a positive impact on students of color, helping them determine different career paths and building their self-confidence (Ovink & Veazey, 2011). Arts, music, and theater groups also had a positive influence. The amount of time students spent participating in these activities and whether the organization was specifically intended for students of color
did not have an impact. However, participation in Greek organizations negatively impacted Black students’ academic performance (Baker, 2008).

Receiving a Pell grant is another factor in Black students staying in school. As quoted in Chen and DesJardins (2010), Long and Riley found that after all aid was calculated, 56% of Black students still had unmet financial need. Black and low-income students usually receive higher Pell grants (Chen & DesJardins, 2010). In the study, Chen and DesJardins (2010) found that Black students were less likely to drop out when awarded more in Pell grant aid. The research also found that minority students demonstrated a higher probability of dropping out if they did not receive a Pell grant. Chen and DesJardins (2010) suggest that the college enrollment and retention gap between students of color and majority students could decrease with more access to financial aid.

**Mentors**

While findings indicate the number of faculty of color has not increased, there is still a need for students to engage with Black faculty and staff who share their experiences (Tillman, 2001). Luedke (2017) found Black and White students were more likely to reach out to mentors of their own color. Findings indicate that Black students are comfortable with mentors of color because they are allowed to maintain their background instead of having to hide it (Luedke, 2017). Students are forced to seek faculty of color to gain authentic relationships and increase their social capital. Staff of color prioritize students as a whole and do not base their relationship solely on academics. They find common cultural experiences with their students, which creates trust and allows faculty to learn about situations students face outside of school. Students and faculty in mentor relationships with people of the same racial background report positive perceptions and obtain more support than mixed-race pairs (Luedke, 2017; Reddick, 2011).
The supportive nature of the relationship between Black faculty and Black students makes faculty feel good about giving back to the community and students inherently promote the faculty members’ happiness and well-being (Griffin, 2013). Mentoring provides the cultural and social capital needed to navigate the university for both Black students and faculty (Luedke, 2017). The outcomes of mentoring are determined by what the protégé needs more than by what the mentor can provide (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011). Honesty is important to create trust in the mentoring relationship.

Women and minorities found matching by race more important than men did, but mentors of the same race received more psychosocial support (Blake-Beard et al., 2011). Women are expected to be nurturers. Black female faculty are closer to students, show more interest in their personal lives, and provide more psychosocial support to students (Griffin & Reddick, 2011). One challenge Black women discuss is that family commitments and their tenure timetable negatively impact their ability to mentor students (Reddick, 2011).

Black male faculty approach their relationships with students, especially females, with “prudence and boundaries” due to the perception of the potential for sexually related accusations (Griffin & Reddick, 2011). They fear the relationship will be misinterpreted due to the stereotype that Black men are dangerous. This stereotype decreases with the age of the mentor; the older the mentor, the more they are looked at as uncles (Reddick, 2011).

Through teaching and engagement activities, Black faculty more frequently form developmental relationships with students than do White faculty and staff (Griffin & Reddick, 2011). In Griffin and Reddick’s (2011) study, one Black faculty member stated that Black students valued him and talked to him often about their expectations and demands. Mentoring students can also provide an unintentional outcome: helping keep faculty centered and happy.
(Griffin & Reddick, 2011). Conversely, some Black students do not seek out mentoring because they feel the need to mask their insecurities when interacting with Black faculty (Reddick, 2011).

Mentors and other mediators can assist Black students with navigating the cultural norms and practices of a PWI campus. These individuals can assist students with building their social and cultural capital by displaying behaviors they can emulate (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Racial identity development is influenced by cultural capital, while a student’s capital prior to college is used to gain status within his or her community (Baber, 2012). Exposure to Black faculty who teach a course on Black history or culture allows students to experience a matter that is relatable to them and increases Black students’ satisfaction with their university administration and faculty (Adams, 2005).

Mentoring has a positive impact on student outcomes, as well as faculty happiness. Institutions should allow for more interaction between faculty and students without ramifications toward faculty members’ professional progress. While relationships may be characterized differently – formal versus informal mentoring – Black faculty feel closer to Black students and want to develop relationships with them because of the challenges they know these students will face. Black faculty have different relationships with Black students than they do with other students. They often involve Black students in their research and offer them academic and career advice. Black faculty are committed to the success of Black students because they want to see them excel as members of the community and they care more because they know the challenges they face as Black students at PWIs (Griffin, 2013; Reddick, 2011).

**Synthesis of Literature**

Higher education opened to Black people over 50 years ago. While the number of Black students enrolling at institutions of higher education has increased since then, it is still not as
high as their White counterparts. The unwelcome campus climate, especially at PWIs, creates a challenge, with incidents of racism continuing to occur. Racism is normal; thus, the storytelling tenet of CRT is important to keep in mind because it would be beneficial if added to the pedagogy, not just to assist Black students, but also to allow White students and faculty to understand the challenges these students face at PWIs. A tenet of CRT is that racism is normal, so being able to educate and prepare Black students for this notion is critical.

In the field of identity development, one controversial issue has centered on Black students’ cultural experiences at PWIs. On one hand, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Berry and Candis (2013) argue that cultural identity is revealed through storytelling. On the other hand, Patton et al. (2007) contend that the conversation about Black people needs to become an institutional focus in order to create a more welcoming campus environment for all students and faculty.

When it comes to the topic of engagement and retention, most scholars readily agree that retention is a result of engagement on campus. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of what types of engagement retain Black students. Whereas some are convinced that connecting to multicultural centers on campus engages students, others maintain faculty mentorship is more effective.

This study begins to explore Generation Z within higher education. Much of the current research focuses on the Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, who have now graduated from undergraduate programs and are either in graduate school or the professional working world. The characteristics of these two generations are different, making research on Generation Z vital to understand the next 15 or so years within the higher education landscape. In comparison to Generation Z, members of whom understand the value of education in reaching their goals,
Millennials have often been characterized as selfish or narcissistic, having been told they were winners even when they failed, which created some disillusionment about their true abilities and skills.

The following chapter provides an articulation of the selected methodology for this research project.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this study, understanding how Black students at a PWI perceived their experiences with Black faculty was explored through the lens of critical race theory. The study was conducted at a private university in the mid-Atlantic part of the country with Black students who were in at least their third year of study. The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm was used with a qualitative study to answer the research question because it allowed the students to tell their stories and the researcher to understand better how students’ experiences impacted their daily lives, with the hope of bringing more attention to the need for Black students to connect with Black faculty.

Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a related group of assumptions about the world that serves as a framework and guide for researchers (Ponterotto, 2005). The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm is more personal than others. The idiographic, or individual, perspective seeks to uncover the multiple realities of unique individuals, while emic distinction is about the unique behaviors of the world being studied. There is a stronger connection between the researcher and the participants in this paradigm, which is concerned with finding a deeper meaning in reality, and it allows for multiple realities. Research within this paradigm is usually qualitative with observations and interviews (Ponterotto, 2005).

In this form of research, the researcher seeks to experience and understand participants’ daily lives. The researcher’s deep reflection shows hidden meaning behind the issues being studied, which can only happen through intense interactions between researcher and participant. The reality the researcher seeks to uncover can only be provided by the participant. Reality is influenced by individuals’ perceptions and shaped by their environment and values,
including ethnic and cultural values. Whereas post-positivism is objective, constructivism-interpretivism is subjective (Ponterotto, 2005).

The results are presented in a detailed, descriptive manner and are in the first-person to bring the reader into their lived experience. Central to this paradigm is the interaction between the researcher and participants because it is critical to capturing their reality. While only a few participants were involved in the present study, the interviews took place over a long period of time and were only conducted by one researcher. The axiology, or researcher values in the scientific process, contends that the researcher’s experience cannot be teased out of the research process, so while there is an awareness of bias, it is not eliminated (Ponterotto, 2005).

Constructivism-interpretivism helped the researcher understand how Black students perceived their experiences with Black faculty at a PWI. Being invested in the study, the researcher followed students to understand more fully and entrench herself as much as possible in the students’ daily experiences at the university. The goals and potential outcomes for this research included determining what factors contribute to Black students being engaged and retained at a PWI and how Black faculty on campus may impact this engagement and retention. The emic distinction of the research was the students’ unique characteristic as being Black at a PWI.

Only six Black students participated in this study. Point-in-time research was conducted, which allowed for reflection on past and present experiences. There was no set structure for interviews, but researcher made sure the research questions were answered throughout the process as appropriate. Since the researcher possessed the same characteristics as the student participants, she spent time reflecting on personal experiences as a way to start and drive the research process. Questions and interactions with student participants targeted specific ideas,
such as what their interactions with Black faculty had been, what resources and services they had used, where they felt supported and safe, and their identity as Black students at a PWI.

The research report is delivered in the first-person and highlights each individual’s unique story. This technique allows those with lived experiences to obtain a deeper awareness of what they have gone through, which may not have been revealed if they did not participate in the study (Ponterotto, 2005).

After reviewing the paradigms, the researcher felt that constructivism-interpretivism aligned best with the research question. It is more personal and seeks to uncover each individual participant’s multiple realities. A connection formed between the researcher and participants because the study sought to understand participants’ lived experiences. The research is also more qualitative, focusing on observations and interviews (Ponterotto, 2005). One weakness of constructivism-interpretivism is the subjective nature of it. Any research with this paradigm poses the limitation of presenting a view from a specific population; thus, the results and recommendations may not be easily transferable to other contexts.

**Research Methods**

IPA was used in this research project; it is a version of phenomenology that began with Husserl in the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, it is a newer methodology and was first described by Smith in 1996. IPA was formed from a combination of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, which argues that the meanings individuals attribute to events should be the primary concern of a study. The goal of IPA is to explore participants’ views of the world and obtain meaning through an interpretive process (Smith, 1996). Smith (1996) also states that the researcher plays a vital and integral role in IPA, which was developed specifically to allow the researcher to produce a theoretical framework based upon participants’ own terminology and
conceptualizations (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). The goal of IPA is to describe the
phenomenon experienced by a small group of individuals (Alase, 2017).

There are important differences between IPA and phenomenology. IPA requires more in-depth data collection and analysis than phenomenology, which has the primary goal of clarifying participants’ lived experiences (Alase, 2017). IPA emphasizes the dynamic nature of research, while the researcher plays an active role in the interpretive process. While the participant makes sense of his or her world, the researcher makes sense of the participant trying to make sense of his or her world (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Smith and Osborn (2008) argue that IPA is participant-oriented because humans’ lived experiences are analyzed for meaning. Researchers appreciate phenomenology because of the structured method of data analysis provided through the formula Moustakas developed in 1994 (Alase, 2017).

The misconceptions about IPA seem to stem from the narrow scope of a few empirical studies. Whereas phenomenology is a more structured method of research, IPA is an approach for qualitative data analysis. The basic problem with phenomenology is that the participant is accessible to analysis as a reflection of the lived experience (Larkin et al., 2006).

IPA was appropriate for the present research study because it allowed the participants to share their stories in a way that allows the reader to see him or herself in those stories. Alase (2017) states, “[The] IPA approach can afford new and novice researchers the opportunity to explore, in more detail, the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participants (p.9).” CRT was utilized because it works well with IPA since it allows for critical investigation and interpretation of the impact of a phenomenon on lived experiences (Alase, 2017).
**Reflexivity Journal and Field Notes**

Being able to reflect on her personal experience as a scholar-practitioner during the research process was important for the researcher. It allowed her to have a forum for her voice that was separate from the interviews. Having a separate notebook or journal also assisted with keeping her biases in check. It was used to record any questions she had that needed to be addressed, her own responses to some of the questions intended for the participants, and ideas for future research. The notebook does not contain any participant information. Notes taken during the interview were kept on separate sheets of paper, locked in a secure box, and destroyed upon completion of this research.

**Population, Recruitment, and Sampling**

Research participants were undergraduate Black students at the research site. The researcher preferred to include pre-juniors, juniors, and seniors, as they had more experience at the university and had more opportunities to engage with the campus community. Students who identified as Black, including those with mixed ethnicities, were recruited. Four females and two males participated, though gender was not a crucial component of this study, especially if students happened to identify as gender non-conforming. The ideal number of participants for IPA is up to 25, but for this study, a sample size of six was enough to create a compelling story while not making the analysis and coding process overwhelming. More than six students expressed interest, but due to scheduling, they were not all available for individual interviews. Those students who were not individually interviewed were invited to participate in the focus group, but only one actually participated.

Purposeful sampling was used and provided a level of intentionality that allowed for a deeper understanding of the central phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Purposeful sampling also allowed for a homogeneous population – that is, a population with more common characteristics – and a significant relation to the research question (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Participants were recruited through direct email communication. To identify a larger pool of students than the few with whom the researcher had consistent contact, she ran a report through the university database that filtered for race/ethnicity and class standing. Due to her relationship with this population on campus, the researcher was able to recruit enough students by email and verbal invites.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with six participants. Scholars recommend three for researchers who are conducting IPA for the first time to allow for relationship-building and increased engagement. More than three were chosen to provide more student experiences and provide more evidence to support the research question. The participants were a closely defined homogeneous sample. The semi-structured interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes per participant per session, which allowed the conversation to move in directions about which the researcher had not thought (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Follow-up was not needed after the initial sessions. Each student was provided with their profile which highlighted what would be included in the write-up also giving them the opportunity to provide feedback. Participants determined the times and locations of the interviews to ensure they were comfortable. Technology, the Rev.com app for the iPhone, was used to collect data, and traditional pen-and-paper notes were used to capture observations during the interviews (Alase, 2017).
Data Coding and Analysis Process

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the analysis varied by participant based on the individual conversations (Smith & Osborn, 2008). One of the steps in the analysis process required the researcher to provide a description of her own experience with the phenomenon being studied to prevent her from inserting personal experiences into those of the study participants (Alase, 2017). Most of the data analysis was conducted by transcribing the interviews and coding the data.

The interview transcription for IPA should be done at a semantic level, meaning that all words spoken, including false starts, pauses, and laughs, should be captured. The transcriber should expect to spend anywhere from five to eight hours transcribing each one-hour interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The coding process required multiple readings of the verbatim transcripts. Smith and Osborn (2008) and Alase (2017) recommend the following process be used in transcription analysis:

- Read through the transcript to identify commonly repeated themes, words, or phrases. This first read helps break down lengthy interviews. Some individuals like to color-code and/or use stickers and sticky notes, as well. The margins should be used to notate interesting and significant facts on one side and emerging themes on the other.
- A second read-through should be conducting while listening to the interview, which helps clarify points and ensures transcript accuracy.
- A third read-through may be helpful in identifying additional themes and new patterns, as well as condensing main ideas.

Following the coding of themes in the transcripts, these codes should be written on a separate sheet of paper so the researcher may begin looking for connections and condensing themes. Creating a table that includes the themes and verbatim quotes that support each theme may be helpful.
Limitations

Several limitations impacted the outcomes of this study. Even though this research was about faculty members specifically, students also referenced Black staff members with whom they had interacted. Additionally, the research was one-sided, only conveying students’ opinions; while the student experience is important, it is equally important to understand faculty perspectives on this issue. Finally, although some of the research in the literature review indicated that White students also have a tendency to seek out Black faculty for more authentic relationships, this phenomenon was not explored in this study.

Reciprocity and Trustworthiness

There was no direct benefit to students participating in this study. In exchange for the students sharing their lived experiences, they were entered in a random drawing to receive a $50 gift card to a Cinemark movie theater. The participants were also invited to a focus-group discussion where a light dinner was served.

Throughout the research process, one of this researcher’s priorities was to ensure student participants’ safety and comfort. While it is important to share their stories, the researcher wanted to ensure they were comfortable with the way they were represented. After the individual interviews were transcribed, students had the opportunity to review and correct anything they felt may have misrepresented them.

Themes were identified and used to further draw out experiences during the focus-group discussion, which offered students another opportunity to share experiences they may not have mentioned in individual interviews and hear about other students’ experiences. The students again had the opportunity to review the transcripts of what they had said to ensure proper
representation. A final check was completed after the analysis was finished. The students were able to review the analysis to ensure they were comfortable with the data presented.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

This research was qualitative and included interviews with current Black undergraduate college students. The interviews were recorded using the Rev.com app for the iPhone and transcribed by Rev.com staff. The researcher and Rev.com are the only entities with access to the raw interviews. Participants were made fully aware of this process, along with their rights to see the final written transcripts. The researcher explained how she planned to publish the interview, either in whole or in part. While this publication is still not certain, updating the participants as the process continues will be important.

The researcher was as transparent as possible about the potential for publishing the data throughout the research process (Mockler, 2014). She discussed the study’s original intent and possible future uses of the information based on trends or findings. Where and when the information is published may change as a result of the research, so it is the researcher’s responsibility to notify the participants when new information emerges.

There may have been limits to participants’ confidentiality and privacy, which was also discussed with the participants as part of the informed consent process. As an educator, the researcher had a duty to inform, which meant if there was a disclosure of abuse or an intent to harm self or others, she would have had to notify the appropriate authorities. The researcher had the responsibility of ensuring the participants’ physical safety and well-being, as well. If he or she did not feel safe, a participant would have been required to withdraw from the research; any information gathered from that participant up to that point could not be used and must be destroyed if not considered discoverable evidence.
Integrity

The researcher’s integrity as a scholar-practitioner was important to maintain throughout the research process, and the integrity of the research process needed to be maintained by protecting the participants as described in the next section. If the researcher’s integrity came into question, it could impact the study results, which were used to support the interpretation and methods of delivery for presenting the data (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Ensuring that the researcher did not harm as a scholar-practitioner did no harm was a significant part of maintaining her integrity. Her relationship with the participants was protected through fair and consistent treatment, as well as by establishing practices that may benefit the targeted population at large institutions, such as building more safe spaces for Black students and developing programming specific to their needs (Mockler, 2014).

The researcher’s professional level within the institution where the study took place may have contributed to the participants perceiving her as a person of power. While power dynamics may have occurred naturally as a result, the researcher was aware of that perception while conducting research and remained clear about her own positionality (Mockler, 2014). She balanced the study’s methodology, human rights, and personal values to prevent potential threats to the research (Kimmel, 1988).

Conflicts of Interest

If a conflict of interest had arisen during the study, it would have been addressed immediately through a discussion with the participant(s) involved or a trusted colleague to obtain an objective view of the situation. A conflict could have been due to factors like information a participant disclosed or a relationship forming outside the scope of the research. As Jacobs (2016) mentions, her role shifted between researcher, educator, and ally. Boundaries were
established as needed to prevent misunderstandings. Thus, it was permissible for this researcher’s role to shift given the population and the study’s goals, but she was able to examine her intent and ensuring it did not impact the study or her integrity.

**Non-Discrimination**

Although as Black college students, the study participants shared similar characteristics to the researcher, a note about non-discrimination was still important. Discrimination can occur based on factors beyond race and ethnicity; it can include biased based on other factors like socioeconomic status or beliefs. The researcher understood and recognized her positionality throughout the researcher process, as well as the implications for how that positionality would be represented in the research (Briscoe, 2005). She remained open and receptive to the study findings (Mockler, 2014). As a scholar-practitioner, she did not make any false representations of the data. To ensure her interpretation and representation of participants’ experiences were accurate, participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts (Briscoe, 2005).

One intended outcome for this research was to give voice to those who have less power. The researcher’s collaboration with participants as part of this research gave them the opportunity to participate in dialogue that could assist in their transformation, which could also lead to the research benefitting the whole community (Mockler, 2014).

**Informed Consent and Confidentiality**

Informed consent was presented upon the researcher’s first interactions with participants, letting participants know the reasons for the research, main features of the research design, and any potential risks. The participants were able to make rational decisions, could comprehend the information discussed, and were not coerced in any way to participate (Kimmel, 1988). The researcher was as transparent as possible throughout the process about the potential for
publishing the study’s findings (Mockler, 2014). She maintained responsibility for discussing the study’s intent and her future use of the information obtained. While future uses for this research are not yet known, being able to update the participants as the process continues is important. Participants were informed of their rights to see the final written transcripts, ensuring the researcher’s interpretation and representation of the participants’ experiences were accurate (Briscoe, 2005).

The researcher was also responsible for protecting participants’ privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. The researcher knew the identity of all participants; however, to protect their identity and right to privacy, she used pseudonyms when reporting study findings. The transcriber had access to the interviews but not to participants’ identifying information. All identifiable information was kept with the researcher in a locked and password-protected format. Participants could also elect to have their identities revealed if they wanted to be credited as participating, which required them to sign an additional release (Kvale, 2007).

**Conclusion**

As a methodology, IPA helped bring Black student participants’ experiences at a PWI to the forefront. It related well with CRT to highlight the students’ voices in their own words. The researcher hopes these stories will be shared with senior leaders and they will understand the importance of supporting programs for these students.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This research study explored and answered the following primary qualitative question through interviews with students: “How do Black students at a PWI perceive their experiences with Black faculty?” Overall, study participants expressed that there was a lack of Black faculty present on campus, and they shared what they would like to have regarding support and interaction. While in the beginning of the study, all participants claimed that seeing Black faculty on campus was not important to them, they eventually expressed that they came to see the importance of seeing people who look like them in places where they aspire to be. They now seek mentorship and opportunities to share their voices with the university’s executive administrators since they believe that is who can make changes. The students discussed other ways they were able to find support on campus: through other staff members, student organizations, and friends. Finally, the students provided some recommendations for the university to take into consideration.

I reached out to students who were in their third year and above and identified as Black in their admissions records. Based on IPA recommendations, student responses, and availability, six upper-division undergraduate students in their third year and above were interviewed. Four participants were female and two were male. They came from a variety of academic programs, allowing for a range in perspective and experience. The following four themes were identified through the conversations:

- Finding our support
- Seeing someone who looks like me
- Our voice represented on campus
- The classroom at a PWI
Participant Profiles

I began by sending an email to students who had identified as Black in their admissions applications. I sent a targeted email to the students on the list with whom I had previously interacted. This process led to the inclusion of four female students. I then filtered the list for only male students and obtained four more responses, but only two of those students were able to participate in interviews due to scheduling. Students had the option of where they would like to meet but they all opted to meet in my office, which contains a round table and chairs that makes it more informal than a traditional office setup. Each interview lasted 40-45 minutes.

Maxine

I had known about Maxine for a few years prior to the interview because of her involvement in the university’s City Scholars program, though we did not have many chances to interact. She served as a resident assistant (RA) for a program managed by the center I direct at the research site, but as an employee, she interacted mainly with a coworker. Maxine was a senior communications major who grew up in the city around in which the research site is located. She attended Gold High School, which is considered to be the best public high school in the city. She reported that the student racial makeup of her high school was approximately 40% Black, 50% White, and 10% other races, while the faculty were predominantly White. She had formed a bond with the single Black faculty member who taught her at Gold: “Out of a full four-year experience, one teacher. And I really clung to her because she was the only Black teacher.”

The reason Maxine ultimately chose to attend the research site was that she had received the City Scholars scholarship, which provides 50 awards to city graduates and covers full tuition and fees. Initially, she did not feel the university was a good fit for her. Since she was local to the area, she had often visited the university for class trips, but she did not remember seeing
herself represented in the student body. Her dream school was an HBCU a few hours away, but she would have had to take out student loans to attend, whereas she did not to attend the research site. Maxine will graduate with a degree in communications. She discussed a couple of ideas for the type of work she might want to do, including a position in diversity recruitment for a college or university so she could have a positive impact on. She said,

Diversity recruiting became a thing in this last year, ‘cause I’m just realizing the more I am the only one in my experiences, the more uncomfortable I am. And I wanna’ add more people to these spaces. So, I would even do diversity recruiting for a college, just because I see the lack of diversity within the higher education space.

Throughout her five years at the university, Maxine was able to find support within her communications department. Through her own ambition, she shared her goals and aspirations with the university and participated in some incredible opportunities, including internships at several local news stations. When she interacted with people in her field, one of the first questions she asked them was about their perspectives on the companies for which they work. Maxine understood that the professional industry she was planning to enter is not that diverse, but she still wanted the university to make an effort to hire more Black faculty to teach her. To connect with Black professionals, she used LinkedIn to find people who looked like her.

Due to the lack of Black faculty on campus, she clung to individuals in other roles, including those in the cafeteria and other campus services. One woman in particular, the manager of a campus coffee shop, served Maxine as “another mother.” Maxine recalled the level of interest this woman showed in her and her friends, making sure they went to class and did well. Regardless of the role an individual held at the university, Maxine expressed the importance of connecting with people who look like her:

One of the things I feel like I’ve done as a substitute for the lack of Black faculty is I clung to the people that work at the cafeteria and [coffee shop]. I don’t know, just
because I think it’s important to see people that are like you, that look like you physically.

This relationship allowed her to stay authentic to herself without the need to code-switch, which had become an automatic strategy for her. She felt that Black people are judged if they speak in either a too-cultured or too-Black way:

I don’t have to switch my voice up or increase my vocabulary, ‘cause they’re not worried about that stuff. But I feel like that’s some of the things you have to do when you’re speaking to people that aren’t of color.

When asked about whether she had ever experienced racism, stereotyping, or microaggressions in the classroom, Maxine said yes without hesitation. The experience Maxine shared also highlighted her feelings as an imposter. She recalled an incident in one of her first classes at the university when a White faculty member stated, “You’re a lot smarter than you look.” As someone who had achieved many accomplishments through high school, including being valedictorian of her graduating class, Maxine started to doubt herself. She thought about reporting the incident but feared she would have to prove the comment was racist. Like another experience she had had when she was younger, she was hesitant to report the incident because she did not think she would be believed or supported. While her mom reaffirmed Maxine’s feelings that she belonged at the university, she expressed feeling she would have benefited from talking about the experience with a Black university professional.

Maxine said that academic discipline was not an important factor in connecting with Black faculty on campus. As a senior, she had taken courses in other disciplines like business and biology, and she still had not been taught by any Black faculty. She shared,

I can’t say the lack of diversity has in turn become lack of support, ‘cause that’s not true. I just feel like I would’ve gotten other means of support out of having Black faculty, you know? Like the mentorship I talked about, just being able to openly conversate about my life and have somebody be able to relate or at least not look at me like, “This is so…,” you know?
Given where Maxine was in her life, she wanted mentorship to include getting insight into the workplace, how to navigate it as a Black person, and how Black people are treated at different points of their own career journeys. She felt that being able to share her experience with Black faculty would have made her more comfortable because they would have been less judgmental. Maxine came from a low-income neighborhood and feared being wrongfully judged based on that fact alone. She felt a Black faculty member would have tried to relate to her in some way.

Maxine did not feel a sense of community on campus, though Black students on campus are creating it for themselves, more now than before. She knew a few students who had started or restarted Black student organizations. There was a tenacity in their desire to create a sense of community. While it made a difference, Maxine felt there was still more that could be done on campus, but it would require the backing and support of senior-level leadership.

Black students do not feel they have a voice on campus. Maxine proposed changing the student government:

Maybe I think I would make it more of a Black student government. Because I feel like out of all the aspects of college, that’s where we lack the most. And one thing I know about the student government is they get in front of the Board, and they get in front of senior leadership a lot, and they’re able to voice their opinion[s] and any changes that happen, they’re at those tables, you know? And I just feel like if we’re not there, then we’re missing a big part of the discussion. So, that’s probably what I would do. Give Black students their own student government. Or facilitate their involvement in the student ... They might not need their own, but just to put them in the student government positions, because whenever I look at it, it’s not a lot of diversity.

Maxine’s recommendation to the university would be to recruit more diverse faculty and staff. Increasing the presence of Black faculty and staff increases students’ opportunities for mentorship and other supportive programs.
Nikki

Nikki is another student I had known about for years due to her participation in the City Scholars program. She worked for my department one summer as a peer mentor for our summer program. Unfortunately, I did not get to interact with her personally at that time. Nikki was a city native in her third year at the university. She had settled on psychology as her major after switching from public health and then nursing. Nikki had attended an all-Black, African-centered high school where most (not all) of the faculty were also Black. Based on her personal experiences with family and the criminal justice system, Nikki planned to be a lawyer and make changes in the system. She chose the university because she received the City Scholars scholarship, which covers full tuition and fees.

Nikki did not expect to see many Black faculty at the university, although she did expect a diversity department and efforts to increase diversity. At the time of the interview, she had been able to connect with only one Black faculty member in the psychology department, but she expressed wanting to see more. It was important to her because “it’s just good to see representation, to know that I could get to where they are as a professor.” She had also been taught by another Black faculty member, a popular male professor in the sociology department. Based on those two experiences, she reported feeling a difference in the classroom environment when a Black faculty member was teaching. While Nikki was comfortable speaking in any setting, she sometimes became self-conscious and tried to sound “smarter,” even though her efforts were met with reservations.

At first, Nikki was unsure about having experienced racism, stereotypes, or microaggressions in the classroom, but after some thought and conversation, she shared two different experiences. The first was based on a misunderstanding in communication with an
instructor who was White. Nikki made a statement in class that the teacher did not understand, so she dismissed it. Nikki could tell the teacher had misunderstood her, so she wrote the teacher after class and they were able to clear the situation up. In the moment, Nikki felt all kinds of thoughts running through her head, as if “I was speaking a different language or something.”

The second incident Nikki referenced occurred in a class taught by the university at a local prison in which university students participated in class with the inmates. She was able to connect with the inmates because of their connection to the city and because some were Black. She often spoke up for them in class and she felt the White faculty member would try to sway her to side with the other White students instead. As a result, the teacher stopped calling on her and she was unable to participate in class. When the inmates spoke, the teacher was dismissive of them, possibly because they were in prison or speaking in slang. Nikki recalled,

After a while, she would stop calling on me. Because they would kind of get their points across through me because I was a student. So, they would tell me, and I would speak for them. Or if they weren’t being understood by the rest of the class, I would try to clarify it. And she just kind of shut that down, so … but I’m not, I don’t … I never know if it’s what I think it is or if I’m just overthinking things. But, yeah, but towards the end of the course, I couldn’t speak anymore because she would just stop calling on me, because she would know that I’m gonna’ try to clarify what they’re trying to say. Because like I said, where I felt like the professor misunderstood me, I would notice that when they would speak, she would just dismiss it.

Ideally, Nikki would have liked to see an even split of Black and White faculty at the university, but not all Black. It was important to Nikki to interact with people with different backgrounds to get different perspectives, especially since she would need that skill as a future lawyer. For her, helpful interactions would include guidance to help push her ahead and sharing opportunities for students of color. It would also be helpful to share experiences, gain professional development, and learn how to deal with microaggressions while remaining professional and not getting discouraged.
Nikki reported feeling supported on campus. She noted that her academic advisor when she had been in the public health program was a Black woman who connected her to study abroad opportunities. She did not think she could afford to study abroad, but the academic advisor showed her that there were grants and scholarships available to participate. Nikki also participated in research with a JD/PhD student who was also Black and helpful to her. Outside of the university, she connected with professionals in the legal field through her cooperative education experience, in which she conducted trainings for the police academy.

The City Scholars program was a helpful resource to Nikki. The program pairs students with professional faculty and staff from around the university who serve as mentors. She was lucky enough to be paired with a mentor who worked in the university’s law school. During the first year, students in the program live together in the residence hall with RAs who are also in the program and can serve in a peer-mentor capacity. One of Nikki’s RAs was an upper-division Black female student with whom Nikki felt comfortable. She remembered having a conversation about wanting to see more Black faculty on campus:

And I was telling her, “Do you seek out Black professors? Or do you not care; you just find out when you get there?” And she’s like, “No, there’s nothing wrong with wanting Black professors, you know.” And it made me feel kind of better about it.

Thus, the scholarship program created a sense of community on campus for Nikki. She and the students with whom she lived formed bonds because they lived together for the first year and were all from the city.

Nikki recounted one negative experience she had had with the counseling center on campus. She was going through a period of anxiety and panic attacks and decided to use the counseling center. In her conversation with the therapist, she started talking about her upbringing
and mentioned that her father used to “beat her,” which is a common term used to describe being punished in the Black community. The conversation ended abruptly:

And he was like, “One second, I have to go check with my supervisor and make sure that’s not considered child abuse. One second.” And I ran. As soon as he left, I ran out the back door and left and was like, “I will never go there again.” Or, if I went, I would have to literally request a Black therapist, because I feel like he was, like, looking at me like ... It’s like he was asking me the questions, setting me up to answer these questions in a way. And it was just so weird. And it’s like, is it because he’s a man and I’m a woman? Is it because I’m Black and he’s White? What's the disconnect?

She felt she had stepped out of her comfort zone to seek therapy but was shut down and even turned off by the experience. A space that was supposed to be safe no longer felt that way, and instead she felt judged. While the experience did not turn her off from seeking therapy, she reported a willingness to go back only if she could be paired with someone Black or female.

Diversity efforts on campus felt forced to Nikki. She reported feeling that Black events should be promoted the same way everything else on campus is promoted. For example, Homecoming, which occurred during the week of the interviews, was promoted everywhere on campus in a way that would be hard to miss. Nikki admitted that promoting Black events on campus may be challenging because people gravitate to what they like and what feels “safe” for them. If a Black event for Black people was going to occur, it should be planned and facilitated by Black people. Nikki felt that students would be more inclined to attend certain events if they knew Black faculty were working to bring Black students together. She said,

Like, if I knew that these Black faculty members came together to bring these Black students together, I would be more inclined. But if I know it’s just the president of the diversity department just being, “Okay, let’s put this flyer out and put red, black, and green on it and they’ll show up,” it’s like, no.

One example she gave was of a Blacks in Psychology group in her program of study. Considering the lack of Black faculty in the psychology department, she and her classmates were skeptical about who was actually bringing the group together. Nikki expressed pride in her
Blackness and what she had achieved, and she wanted to ensure students coming to the university after her were also successful and able to achieve.

**Summer**

Summer and I met a few months before the study began. She was recruited as a mentor for a new program for incoming students of color a few days before classes started. Because of the intensity of the program, we bonded. Summer was a senior public health major. She had lived all over, but mostly in southern Florida, Jamaica, and the city where the university is. She had attended three different high schools, graduating from a suburban prep school just outside the city. This high school was predominantly White, and students’ socioeconomic status was obviously high:

And it was like there was a few Black students and you could definitely tell their income level, ‘cause all the White students had their car and drove to school and everything. And then all the Black students, myself included, and the few Latinos that were there, we all took the bus. Seniors, freshman, it didn’t matter what we were, we all took the bus. And you could definitely feel the … not tension, but just the difference. It was very apparent to me that I was in a place where I was different.

During her time in high school in southern Florida, she came to a realization about her race. The high school was diverse, although she described it as containing mostly White Hispanics, a group that is considered to have minority status but that looks White. Summer also observed that colorism is not political or systemic in Jamaica the same way it is in the United States. Summer reporting having to put blinders on to prevent attacks from other people. She shared an early experience in which she experienced racism in the classroom. She was in the high-school marching band and was sitting in the band room listening to a friend. As they talked, a White boy walked up and told her to shut up, even though she was not talking at the time. His reason for telling her to shut up was because his grandparents had owned hers.
Summer grew up interested in science. She was part of a STEM prep program as a child and had spent most of her summers at a university in Texas conducting research with various faculty members. The summer after her sophomore year of high school, she was paired with a faculty member at the research site’s medical school. He tried to talk her into considering the university, but she was convinced she wanted to go to the west coast for college. However, during the college-application phase, she realized she did not want to major in biology or chemistry and thought that public health would set her apart. There were not many undergraduate public health programs at that time, and since she was already familiar with the area, she decided to apply to the university. Unfortunately, she was rejected from her first-choice school on the west coast, but she believed that “when they say the college you end up going to is where you should be, they really do mean that. So, I’m happy.”

Regarding her expectations about Black faculty at the university, Summer already knew what to expect, being in America and having spent a summer at the university. At first, it was not important for her to see Black faculty; she was not concerned about it when she applied to schools. However, as a senior, it had become more important because it could have given her a sense of hope. Summer wanted to hear Black faculty members’ stories, especially since not all of them had taken a traditional path to teaching. She commented that conversations with faculty that look like you “will kind of aid the college experience.”

During her time at the university, Summer had only been taught by two Black faculty. She recalled feeling a difference in the environment with one of those professors, mostly because it was a sociology course on race and society. The other course was required for her major, so the structure and flow were probably dictated by the program. The instructor of the sociology course made sure that he gave the Black students space and opportunity to talk. Often, Black students
can feel overshadowed by their White peers, but this faculty member gave a “voice to the voiceless.” Summer reported that it was also helpful having a Black faculty teach a course on race because “it made it more relevant to me.” Because it was a discussion-based class, the professor was able to bring perspectives that a White faculty member could not bring. Summer shared,

Well, I’m not a person of a viewpoint that thinks that people who aren’t people of color can’t empower or do things for the benefit of people of color. I know that a lot of people are kinda’ iffy about that, they have their own opinions… With the [sociology] class, I think it was very important that a person of color taught that specific class. Not to say that a person that is not of color can’t teach the course, but I feel like the impact was that much more valuable.

The impact of having a Black faculty member teach a course on race may not be the same for everyone, but there is value in personal experience and cultural relevance. Summer did not report any explicit experiences of racism or stereotypes on campus, but she would categorize the incidents she had experienced in college as microaggressions that she believed were mostly due to her Jamaican accent. A faculty member suggested that she annunciate her words more:

But when I first arrived here, I did have an incident where a professor suggested that I annunciate my words a little more, but it was more so on the tone, like “I can’t understand what you’re saying.” And I kind of knew it was coming from that, because they kept asking me to repeat, to repeat. And I’m like, I’m clearly speaking in English, where we both understand, so clearly there’s just something else going on there. And it did hurt my feelings at one point, because I was like this is where I come from, this is the way I talk. And I get backlash from both sides. Like my parents say that I speak with a twang now, because I use an American accent to kinda’ get through life here, and then it’s just a back-and-forth thing.

She compared this experience to one in which faculty get lazy and do not try to pronounce a student’s name properly, but instead force the student to come up with a nickname that is easier to pronounce. For example, if a student’s name is Elizabeth and the faculty member cannot say it, he or she may encourage the student to go by Liz.
The suggestion to announce her words forced Summer to take on a more American accent. Her code-switching, or speaky-spokey, as it is referred to in Jamaica, had a lot to do with her accent and when she was able to use it. If her family heard her using an American accent, they questioned her about it. Summer was the president of a West Indian student organization on campus, so many of the members were also West Indian, and while they sometimes spoke different versions of Patois, she was able to speak in her true voice without criticism. On one occasion, she was out with other students from the organization and they were all speaking in Patois. Then the customer service representative asked her a question, and she immediately switched to her American accent. That threw people off and she was questioned about being from Jamaica.

Summer would love more Black faculty to teach her to increase the diversity of her experiences. Before our conversation, she had never thought about what she wanted from Black faculty because she had not been exposed to them in a way that made her think about it. She felt that Black faculty bring a lot to the table and can be mentors and sponsors to Black students. Many of her support systems on campus were based on her role as the leader of a student organization. As a cultural ambassador, she was connected to the staff in the cultural student center on campus, which allowed her to use her voice and see change happen as a result. When she studied abroad for nearly nine months, the staff at the center would email her to check in and see how she was doing. Summer also had a part-time job on campus in the alumni center. She believed that was the only reason she was aware of the Black alumni group and the faculty and staff of color group on campus. Unfortunately, if students are not in the right circles, they may not know about these groups and the opportunities that exist on campus. Summer shared,

So I wish that there was more opportunities for them to present themselves and students to see them. Because even if I bonded with a faculty member who’s in [media arts] and I
can’t draw, dance, and/or animate for my life, but they could’ve been a really good mentor to me and given me opportunities that I didn’t know I could have. Like, who knows? My research might be in how art affects health. I don’t know. We don’t know.

The West Indian student group became active on campus after years of inactivity because of Summer. She struggled to find a place because of her mixed heritage and having a lighter skin tone. She did not initially feel a sense of community on campus because she was struggling with her identity. Summer felt she “wasn’t Black enough for the Black people, and I wasn’t White enough for the White people with my background.” She was a Divine Nine legacy, but she chose to pledge a predominantly White Panhellenic sorority instead. She did express regret about that decision:

I chose not to do that [join the Divine Nine] and do a White sorority because I didn’t feel Black enough to be part of my legacy. And I didn’t feel like I could relate, and I felt like an outsider at the time. But as I grew and found myself, I’m in a sorority where I feel like an outsider and I kinda’ regret that decision now.

When she made the decision during her first year, there were not many resources for Black students on campus, and she did not feel the university prioritized students of color other than for improving their enrollment numbers. Luckily, that changed. For example, the cultural student center created a space, a room, just for Black students.

Summer recommended changing the hiring process to improve the presence of Black faculty on campus. The university could establish a process similar to undergraduate admissions where they seek to hire qualified people of color who have a passion and aptitude for the work. Increasing the number of Black faculty could increase the opportunity for students of color to hear faculty stories about their own opportunities, struggles, and accomplishments. Summer reported,

I would’ve loved to hear stories from my faculty of color, ‘cause I think that in my time of not really honing what I was doing and having a minority parent that’s “You have to be a doctor, and this is how you’re gonna’ do it”… So, it would’ve been helpful in that.
So, I think the university needs to make a more cognizant effort and really hone in on the mission and why, for the purpose of hiring more diverse faculty. And I think that when they see the purpose and see the value it brings, they will be open to hiring more diverse faculty.

She also recommended having more conversations about the topics discussed in this interview on campus. It could be a class or just a town hall. It is important to make Black students and students of color feel they have a voice. Summer reflected,

It really makes you feel like you have a voice, because a lot of the time we feel like we don’t. And I’m sorry, I’m getting emotional, ‘cause I’m really thinking about all the times where I wish I could’ve spoken up, but I didn’t want to be that one, you know?

She did not want to be a stereotype and admitted that there comes a point where you get tired of code-switching all the time. Having spaces to allow students to be themselves would help. Unfortunately, there have been times where the university has pushed back against Black students and, in return, they have not felt supported. Summer feels she should not have had to start the West Indian student organization herself at such a large institution. She felt people of color must always forcing their way in:

And I feel like a lot of people of color, we’re always forcing ourselves in and making our own ways in. And it becomes very stressful and tiring, especially when you’re young and you’re trying to be like, why do I have to be the example or advocate?

Malcolm

The interview was my first time meeting Malcolm, who was a third-year computer science major in the BS/MS dual-degree program. He was originally from Maryland but spent most of his life in the suburbs just outside the city. Like Maxine, he had attended Gold High School, the best public high school in the area. He said the similarity between Gold and the university was around the rigor of the coursework and students’ ambition and drive.

The university had not been Malcolm’s first choice, but he chose it because they gave him the best financial aid package. He felt he would not have to “break the bank” to attend. He
also settled on the university because it was familiar to him, since a lot of his classmates from Gold were also attending. The cooperative education component was another draw, because he wanted to get experience in the industry before he would actually work in it. The university aligned with the way he was raised: to always want to be a step ahead of the competition.

Malcolm admitted to having taken race relations for granted in the U.S. He was still in high school in 2014 before the climate of the country changed with the new president. While it was an uncomfortable time for him, it did not present a significant enough reason to find another university to attend.

Malcolm had never been taught by Black faculty at the university, but he felt they tried to help him even if they were not teaching him. He wished there were more on campus because he could not relate to all his professors and they could not relate to him. For example, he had a diverse group of friends, but he sometimes found it hard to talk to them about what was happening in the Black community. It would have been nice to know someone who understood what he was experiencing.

Malcolm tried to network with other Black faculty on campus since he did not have any to teach him. Realistically, he did not believe he would be able to find any, considering the technology field is predominantly White, Asian, and male. Black people make up the main group not represented in this field, especially Black women. His mother worked in the tech field, though, and was able to serve him in a mentoring role regarding what to expect in the field. Malcolm had had conversations with his mother about how to recruit more Black women and men into the tech field. He saw it as a challenge: “But there’s no one to even step up into these roles because no one’s experienced. How do we get someone to be experienced enough to have these roles, and how do we get that more standardized everywhere?”
Malcolm expressed not wanting to be the first Black man in a field because he did not want that pressure. For example, “I wouldn’t want to be the only Black professor here.” While Malcolm believed a book should not be judged by its cover, he recognized that it happened.

Malcolm did not recall having experienced racism, stereotypes, or microaggressions in college. He said it was possible, but he was not paying attention because he was focused on other things. When asked whether he would want more Black faculty or if there were enough on campus, he laughed and said, “You can’t get less than zero.” He would love to see more Black faculty on campus to provide more guidance and mentorship, similar to the Black math teacher who had taught him in high school. That teacher had gotten him to be a peer tutor and influenced how he came to view volunteer work. Malcolm expressed wanting to help people in small ways, which he did as a student ambassador and teaching assistant in his program; he did not just want experiences to add to his resume.

Beyond traditional mentorship, Malcolm also would have liked a Black faculty member to act in more of a tutoring role, someone who could discuss their hands-on experience while combining classroom lectures with practical applications for the real world, similar to a shadowing opportunity. While he may have been able to obtain this relationship with a White or Asian faculty member,

I don’t want to have to try and infer and fill in the blanks. I just want someone who, when I talk, they exactly know how I feel, and when they talk, I exactly know how they feel.

Diversity is lacking in the tech field.

Malcolm had participated in a research opportunity on campus with a female faculty member who was considered a minority in the field. Unfortunately, she had been overextended:

Other people were looking at her and saying, “Hey, I want to study under you because you’re a minority in this.” She had to be spread around so many different places, so I couldn’t get the guidance that I needed despite how much I wanted to, and despite how both of us loved the ideas that we had for the research.
Malcolm’s professional preparation had been supported in various ways. His mother worked in the tech field and his father knew much about the field, so Malcolm did not need much support from the university. His Introduction to Computer Science professor had been helpful, as well. The Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation, which serves underrepresented minorities in STEM, had also served as a great resource for Malcolm, especially the Alliance’s director. According to Malcolm,

“She] has been great. Anytime I need to come into her office, her door is open. That’s kind of what I need. I don’t always need guidance on what to do here or what to do there. Sometimes I just need to talk, and [she] hasn’t closed her door on me. I’m very grateful for that, despite the fact I may not go to as many events that she may want me to. But she’s always been keeping opportunities open for me. I was able to go to a research conference last year because she told me about it, and I got second place at the research conference, so I was very happy with that.

Malcolm was able to create his own community on campus but he did not feel the university as a whole had a community. He was confused about why he received so many emails about Homecoming when he felt that people on campus did not actually know each other. The community seemed spread out: “In a school where I don’t even know the student government, I can’t say that the communities, if there is a community here, it’s strong enough that I could continue staying in it.”

The first recommendation Malcolm gave the University regarding improving the presence of Black faculty on campus was to simply have more events. The National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) meets monthly and other Black student organizations do, as well, but not everyone is part of them. Unfortunately, Malcolm recognized there is a stigma around the naming of student organizations:

These organizations’ names hold a weight in the terms of, what do they mean? When I say National Society of Black Engineers, it doesn’t sound like I’m going to everyone in STEM, it sounds like it’s just for engineers. Wanting to join that over another
organization that still look for Black people, those names have power and I know they’re not necessarily trying to exclude people who don’t identify with engineers, but they're going to do so anyway.

He also recommended increasing the number of Black faculty on campus:

I would just love to have an event where people can come, that are Black, and they can just talk and they can get to know one another and network, whatever needs to be done. I don’t feel like that’s here. I would love to have that presence here, because I’d love to meet more Black faculty, and I’d love to meet more Black students. That seems like the perfect starting point.

Richard

While the interview was not my first time meeting Richard, it was my first time having a conversation with him. He was part of a support program for students of color in business that I had cofounded with a colleague over five years ago. We were both active in the program at the same time. At the time of the interview, Richard was a senior business major with a finance concentration. He was originally from England but spent more of his life in an affluent area in Maryland just outside of Washington, D.C. He had attended a predominantly White high school, where less than 10% of the students were Black. Relating to academics and attending college, Richard shared that in high school, he saw himself as “being torn between my White peers, my Black peers who are on the same wavelength as me, and then other Black peers who necessarily weren’t on that same wavelength.”

His primary reason for attending the university was because he wanted to get out of Maryland. The area in which the research site is situated seemed attractive to him as a small, condensed city. The cooperative education program was a main draw, as well, because he thought it would help him get a job after graduation. He was fortunate enough that finances were not an issue for him in making a decision about where to go to college.
College graduation was fast approaching for Richard. While he expressed an interest in going to grad school, he was not in a rush to do so at the time of our interview. He planned to get a job managing client-based portfolios and ideally would like to move to the west coast or back to England.

Entering the university, Richard did not expect the number of Black faculty he would see and interact with to be “super high.” Based on movies he had seen and college tours he had taken, he did not expect to see many, but when he entered the university, he noticed that he could not always tell the difference between Black students and faculty. He felt that while it is important to see Black faculty on campus, bringing Black speakers into classes can also fill a void. Richard’s preference was for Black professionals to speak in classes would have allowed him to see people who looked like him in places where he aspired to be:

[I would like to] hear about the experiences of a developed Black person in industry as opposed to someone who I’m just regurgitating what they said… If he can do it and he looks like me…you’d probably have to do a lot more 20 to 30 years ago.

Richard had been taught by two Black faculty members, one in a civic engagement course and the other was a history professor. The civic engagement course was specifically for students of color in the business program. That classroom environment was more relaxed because it was not a traditional class. His history class, however, was diverse but he did not sense a difference in the environment because a Black faculty member was teaching. Richard report having experienced no instances of racism, stereotypes, or microaggressions in the classroom. Nothing stuck out to him.

With a focus mostly on professional development, I asked Richard to describe his ideal university. He responded,

Obviously, based on merit. But I'd definitely want to do more of a focus on diversity and make it American-centric. So I’m not trying to sound like nationalistic, but a lot of
professors here do come from countries such as India or China, and the language barrier can be very difficult. So I would prefer that it wouldn’t be as difficult for students to learn, but I would also like to see more faces that look like me. Not necessarily Black…maybe a little bit more South American, so still darker skin. But also very more American-focused perspective.

Richard thought this approach would lead to more Black students feeling encouraged to participate instead of being passive learners who just attended class but did not engage further. Encouragement was a key point he thought lacked at the university.

Richard saw some stigmas around participating in certain student organizations. He was one of six Black members in a predominantly White fraternity. He felt he was viewed in a little box:

“Oh, frat boy, what Animal House nonsense you have. You’re just a token,” or so to speak, which wasn't even true back then in 2015. But yeah, I feel like it can be a bit difficult because I’ve also joined other clubs as well. And I’m the only face that’s colored, so to speak, so…but seeing as you produced results, “Oh, you’re just one of us.” Not saying you’re an outsider, but it can be easy internally to think maybe I am a bit on the border of this.

When discussing supports and other interactions with Black people around the university, Richard showed enthusiasm about the business support program for students of color of which he was a member. Many staff affiliated with the program were helpful to him as a student. The advisor in charge of the program, a Black woman, helped him connect to other students when he was abroad in Germany and even checked in with him through email on occasion. The associate dean of business, a Black man, was also a support for him, serving as a mentor. The program had a structured mentor component within the Black alumni group and Richard had been able to connect with an active alumnus who was retired and able to share his wisdom about the professional world.

Richard thought the sense of community he had initially felt on campus was for the wrong reasons. He had an interesting first impression of the university when he came to visit as a
high-school student. He visited around St. Patrick’s Day, which is a heavy drinking and party time in the city. He saw people dressed up in green having a good time, but once he arrived on campus, it was completely different. He quickly saw that students did not attend the basketball games or Homecoming or have any university pride. As he has gotten older, he has noticed “a sense of community but it was involved around having a good time,” regardless of age. Richard believed the cooperative education curriculum also impacted the sense of community because students were on campus for six months and out working for six months:

You see the same faces, I think. Especially with the [cooperative education experience], as well. That definitely…the whole six months on, six months off. It goes, “Oh well, hey, nice to see you. We should catch up.” “Oh, sorry. I’ve got work at 8:00 in the morning,” or “I’ve got class,” or “I’m going on a three-month holiday while you still have to work over Christmas.” So I feel like that is also a major factor. So after freshman year, he goes, “Oh, well, I guess I’ll see” … I’ve seen people I haven’t seen in four years. No, three and a half. But it’s always, “Oh well, at least we finally have nine months together instead of a weekend where I see you at a bar or something or on the street.” So I feel like that’s also a good thing, but also a bad thing in terms of keeping students together.

Richard’s recommendation to the university about improving the presence of Black faculty on campus originated in the design of his ideal university. If classes, especially business classes, used case studies, then they should include and promote Black-owned businesses. He was in a class that featured different guest speakers for seven weeks of the term, and all the individuals were White:

I would say a recommendation is make an effort to promote Black people in this industry or Black business, and then I would feel like that would follow up to being able to say, “Oh well, he was an analyst then and 30 years later wants to get into teaching,” talked at [the university].

Kim

I knew Kim all four years she was at the university. The summer before her first year, she participated in a summer program managed by my office. At the time, my office was housed in a student learning center where Kim and other students in the program would frequent to study.
We built a relationship, though admittedly, at the time of the interview, I had not seen her in a year because my office moved. Kim was a fourth-year psychology major. She came from a predominantly Black suburban area about 40 minutes away from the city. She had graduated from a public high school made up of predominantly Black students and a mix of Black and White teachers. She came to the university because they offered her the most scholarship money, making it the most affordable option for her. While finances were what brought her initially to the university, she came to realize it was a good decision because she was doing well and had made good friends. It felt like a good place for her.

Graduation would occur in just over a year for Kim. Her post-graduation goals included earning an MD/PhD because she was interested in clinical work, as well as research. She developed this interest after a cooperative-education experience. Kim was looking at graduate schools within her home state since they would be cheaper, but she was not opposed to staying in the city where the research site is housed.

When asked about her expectations about the number of Black faculty she would interact with at the university, Kim said she did not have high expectations for seeing that many, especially because it is a PWI. She was most surprised at the fact that she saw so few. Kim wished she had been taught by more Black faculty, as she had only had two Black professors. It was important for her to see Black faculty because

It’s good to see yourself where you at least try to want to be. Like, I see a lot of Black faculty as kind of being models for Black success, in terms of…you could be in this position of authority and everything.

Seeing more Black faculty and faculty of color would mean that the university was actually diverse. It might also make the university less intimidating as a PWI for Black students to want to attend and feel that they may fit in.
The classroom environment was the biggest culture shock for Kim when she arrived. For the first time, she was the only Black student in a class, which was a drastic change for her since she had attended predominantly Black schools all her life. She also noticed differences in the classroom environment when she was taught by a Black faculty member versus a White one.

When we spoke, she was enrolled in an Africana studies course taught by a Black man. Initially, she felt the classroom was

more hostile, almost, because I felt like, this is a Black professor, I need to act professional and all this stuff, but he started…I guess the way he presented himself kind of seemed like he was going to be kind of like a strict Black man. But, at the same time it’s kind of gotten looser, and I think everyone else has felt the looseness of the atmosphere.

The students in the Africana studies class were diverse; there were many Black students and even a few White students. It was not offered every term, so it was hard for Kim to enroll. She wondered if the White students had taken seats from the Black students.

Most of the microaggressions Kim had experienced in college came from faculty. She felt students were more open-minded in her generation. She experienced the microaggressions most when the topic revolved around police and shootings. Kim said,

I feel like there’s always this…it’s a feeling that you get when you feel like everyone’s kind of looking at you, even if they’re not. It’s just kind of like the…people are probably looking at me now because they want to see what a Black person has to say about police brutality and everything.

Kim would like to have more Black faculty teach her. She

like[s] to see Black people in more authoritative positions. And I do think that they have just as much to teach as any other White professor. So I think that if I had that, it would have made me more inclined to take these professors more seriously, I guess.

Even having more people of color on campus would be nice. Kim felt it was important to see an image of what she would like to be. Though there were 10 or 11 faculty members in the
psychology department, Kim had only seen one Black faculty member. It seemed like an odd ratio to Kim, especially because there were a lot of Black students in the psychology program.

Inside the classroom, Kim would have liked to see more Black faculty teaching, regardless of the discipline. She believed it is necessary for Black students to see, especially when examining the statistics of Black and minority students at PWIs, which is not a high number. Kim recommended that if universities want to see more diversity, they be diverse in all aspects, not just with the student population, but also with faculty and staff. She expressed appreciation of the Black faculty meet-and-greet hosted each year at the university. Her interactions with faculty had dropped off since high school because there were no Black faculty at the university. The psychology program manager had been Black and had been a good support, but she left the university about a year prior to the interviews.

Kim was involved in student organizations but it had become harder since she began commuting from home. She was part of a Black student activist organization, for which I am currently the advisor. She does not know if the group had an advisor previously, but she is encouraged to know there is now one who is Black. The other student organization of which she was a part was the premed minority organization, which had originally attracted many of Black students but had shifted to be more diverse.

Outside of her involvement in student organizations, Kim’s friends were her primary support system. Through Kim’s participation in a summer program right before the start of her first year, she had met most of her best friends, who all happened to be students of color, mostly Black. She found it easier to relate to them. The gospel choir was also a space that had allowed Kim to connect to her Christianity, which was important to her. The choir was made up mostly
of Black students, but there were a few non-Black students. The choir director left the university, though, so Kim had not been as engaged since then.

Admittedly, Kim may not have used all the resources available on campus to her fullest ability. She wished she had participated in more student organizations, especially a group for students of color in psychology:

One thing that I do want to get more involved in is the Students of Color in Psychology, because when I was doing things with them, they offer a lot of opportunities and just a lot of…it’s a good outlet for Black students in the psychology department, and other minorities. We’re able to talk to each other about our experiences in psychology, knowing that we are the minority.

Besides her cooperative-education experience, Kim had not had the chance to connect with anyone in her future career. When asked to describe her ideal mentor, she said,

Well, I would definitely prefer to have a mentor that is Black, and mostly a woman, just because I’m a Black woman. I would like to have somebody that I can relate to on that level. And then someone who I guess is a professional, at least. They don’t have to be specifically like a PhD or even a doctor, like a medical doctor. I guess just someone who has experience going through at least the basic level of college. So, somebody that has an education and … qualities. Someone that’s straightforward, I guess. Somebody that’s not going to just skate over the big “This is going to happen” type of stuff. Somebody that’s just going to tell me, “This is what it is, and you’re going to have to be ready for it.” So, I think that’s important, because I think that people often get advice that’s kind of just like, “Oh, you can do it.” And it’s just like, sometimes you really can’t do it, and it’s better to hear what you should look out for if you’re really trying to do something, rather than just saying, “Oh, you can do this.” And then you go into it and you realize, “Oh, this probably shouldn’t have been what I went to.”

Kim was unsure what a sense of community meant at the university. Because the school required such a fast-paced curriculum, it was hard to be around people. Every ten weeks, students were in a new set of classes, making it difficult to commune with people unless they made a serious effort to do so. As a whole, Kim felt there was no sense of community at the university, but different groups had their own communities. Kim identified as part of the Black
community on campus but saw that even within that population, there were smaller communities based on where someone was born.

To improve the presence of Black faculty on campus, Kim recommended ensuring that the proportion of Black students matched the proportion of Black faculty. There were more Black faculty on campus than she saw, but she thought there needed to be an effort to show these faculty to the Black students:

There’s more Black students on campus than there are faculty, and that’s kind of an issue, because we can’t see ourselves teaching, so why should we come to this institution at all if we are being taught by people who don’t even look like us, when we’re in a city full of people who look like us? So, it’s kind of like ... we’re surrounded by a bunch of Black people, but then in this little spot, there’s a bunch of White people. And then you try to bring this in, but we don’t really know how to relate to everybody.

**Synthesis of Themes**

The four themes that came up reflect not only the students’ desires to be connected to Black faculty, but their wants regarding support, community, and having their voices heard on campus. At the conclusion of the individual interviews, a focus group was assembled, which included five of the six individual interviewees, plus one additional female, Angela, who was a fourth-year student majoring in business and engineering.

The themes represent some of the central tenets of CRT. The students focused on the importance of finding support as unique voices of color and ensuring that Black students are able to connect with faculty and staff who look like them and can also share stories. In this way, having their voices represented on campus and in the classroom at a PWI is about students sharing their unique stories and having their views represented. Since Whiteness as property is about White people owning everything, students sharing their voice may help disrupt that model and make sure they have ownership at and a stake in the university. Having their voices represented also means trying to dismantle the thought that racism is ordinary. It is important to
show racism should not be acceptable in society, and attention must be brought to the things that make us feel we are not a valued part of society.

The synthesis of the themes of *finding our support, the classroom at a PWI, seeing someone who looks like me, and our voice represented on campus* primarily includes information discussed in the focus group, but also brings in pieces from the individual conversations as appropriate.

**Finding Our Support**

None of the students in this study expected to see many Black faculty when they first came to the university. While the presence of Black faculty and staff was scarce, the students were able to find some and feel supported on campus. Some were able to find support through participation in student organizations and support programs, meeting university staff and other employees, or going out and seeking support through LinkedIn and other professional networking opportunities (Doan, 2015; Maramba & Velasquez, 2012).

All the students mentioned looking for some form of mentorship from Black faculty and other professionals. While the participants’ individual viewpoints were slightly different, the common sentiment was wanting to see someone who was where they wanted to be or in a position of power to express the unique voice of color. While the female participants used the word *mentor*, the males opted for terms like *tutor* and *professional*. The tradeoff was that if Black faculty were not present, then the university should build a connection with industry and bring to campus Black leaders.

We had a conversation about safe spaces on campus during the focus group as a result of several comments made during the individual interviews. Summer discussed a set of spaces that had been created to support diverse student experiences, allowing students to explore their
intersectionality. The university created individual safe spaces specific to a variety of identity groups (Doan, 2015). There were spaces for Black and African American students, LGBT students, Latinos, women, and students in recovery. The other five students in the room seemed surprised, as none of them had heard about these spaces or, if they had, they were not aware of the spaces’ purpose. Richard mentioned that he did not realize students were allowed in those rooms, while Malcolm noted that he and his friends hung out in the open spaces around those rooms but never knew what was inside. They had assumed the spaces were just for the LGBTQA community. Summer admitted that as often as she went there to meet with the space’s assistant director, she never physically went into the room for Black and African American students and did not share with other students to encourage them to visit, either. During the focus group, Angela asked the group a question:

Since you guys built the community you had in freshman year, did you feel...so, for me, it was like I was in a class with all these non-people of color, all White people...first time being in a large auditorium, but then you came home...you came to your dorm or wherever you lived at, and found a sense of home, so I felt okay. Was it the same experience for everyone here?

Kim shared that she had not had the same experience, because she had come from a predominantly Black area and her residential floor was predominantly White. She felt uncomfortable and judged by the other girls on her floor. Summer also did not feel a sense of home. She struggled with culture and not immediately being able to connect and find Caribbean people or have Caribbean food, so she went through a period of feeling homesick. Maxine and Richard, however, said they felt okay in their new homes because of the groups with which they were associated and finding people with shared experiences, whether it was by race or as city natives.
The general sentiment about community was that students had to be proactive and seek it out. Participants expressed frustration that it had to be that way, but the university was not set up to make it easy to connect naturally. Angela and Nikki mentioned meeting Black students who were not connected and noted that students had to do it themselves or they would never get connected. Participants generally agreed that the summer before freshman year was the best time to connect students. Kim referenced the summer program she had been in with Angela and the fact that four years later, they are still best friends. Richard mentioned the business learning community he was in and how they reached out over the summer so that when he started in the fall, he had already been connected to a community. If those experiences were not set up, though, it may make it harder for students, as with Summer’s situation. She spent her first two quarters finding herself and then, during her third term, she made a conscious effort to find people who looked like her.

While the students understood that realistically it would take time for things to change, they wanted the university to make finding support systems when students start easier. They agreed that students should still be proactive, but they should not have to work as hard to find supports that are easier to find for their White peers.

**The Classroom at a PWI**

The students’ experience with microaggressions seemed to happen primarily in the classroom and were usually committed by White faculty members. As a result of these experiences, students reported feeling like an imposter and seeing the need to code-switch. They struggled to see themselves as *not* inferior based on faculty attitudes (McCoy, 2015).

A few of the students expressed feeling a difference in the classroom when a Black faculty member was teaching instead of a White faculty member. When the topic of discussion in
class was about race and ethnicity, it felt more authentic, comfortable, and relatable to have a Black professor (Adams, 2005). Students felt they could speak more openly and be supported by the faculty. Nikki mentioned in her individual interview the importance of ensuring courses about race and ethnicity were taught by people of color to maintain authenticity. Participants also highlighted the importance of supporting Black students to earn doctorates and take ownership of the curriculum.

During my individual interview with Malcolm, he mentioned race relations in high school and how he had taken them for granted once he got to college. During the focus group, I asked the students how the shift in the presidential administration and overall climate in the country had impacted them at the University. Initially, they began talking about issues external to the university; for example, Richard shared how the drawing of swastikas had increased at his high school and Maxine mentioned how one of her Black female friends had been in Charlottesville when that incident had occurred. Upon reflecting on how the culture at the university had been impacted by the change in national leadership, Maxine shared powerfully,

A lot of racial tension, because I’m not gonna’ say that people are now racist because of Trump. I’m gonna’ say that those people were already racist and now they’re being themselves because our leader is being racist and it’s…people don’t have to hide anymore.

As the others reflected, they mentioned a shirt that was known to be popular among Republicans, and now they saw them all over campus and even in their classrooms. Kim shared,

I felt so uncomfortable being around all these people, and I don’t know if you guys know about these Vineyard shirts that a lot of the kids were wearing that has the big whale on it and a lot of them have…I just felt so uncomfortable, because I knew that a lot of them are Republicans, so they definitely are Trump supporters, and it was really uncomfortable being in a class full of White people and the only ally that I had was my professor.

Summer shared how the president of the student organization for Trump supporters on campus had been in her class during the election season. She and a few other students of color
felt uncomfortable when the student brought up certain issues in class. This experience made summer

more scared to be who I really was and I had to be on my Ps and Qs all the time. I could not give them a reason to feel vindicated in their opinion, and that still happens today. There’s a level of stress and anxiety that people of color experience because they can’t be themselves.

Maxine mentioned how the experience had brought some people of color together after the election. The shift in administration forced students to start thinking for themselves, and students whose parents may have been Trump supporters started breaking away from them. Richard was honest in saying that he was still friends with some Trump supporters, but he had noticed that people were becoming more bold online rather than face-to-face.

While having a level of free speech was important, so is ensuring students’ comfort and safety. When asked what they would want White faculty to know, a few participants wanted faculty not only to talk about race and be aware of it, but to actually take action against acts of racism and microaggressions so people of color would know that it was a priority to help dismantle the notion that racism is ordinary.

**Seeing Someone Who Looks Like Me**

When students first enter the University, they are more focused on transitioning, adjusting to college life, finding friends, and even finding themselves. Initially, seeing Black faculty and people who looked like them was not important to the participants in this study. As they got older and started to think about careers, however, they all expressed feeling the importance and desire to see more people who looked like them, which would give them hope as students that they could make it and may even have made them think differently about their careers.
One individual interview question asked the students whether it was important for them to see Black faculty. Most of them said it was not at first, but it became more important as they became older. This issue was also addressed during the focus group when I asked them why it was not as important when they initially got to the university but it had become important to them now. Kim and Malcolm both said that knowing it was a PWI, they did not expect to see many Black faculty, but then as they both progressed in their studies, they saw even fewer than they had expected. Malcolm shared,

I think for me it wasn’t as big of a deal as I came in because I just didn’t expect how enriching it would be to have a Black professor just teaching. But then I got into the master’s program and I realized, “Hey, there’s not only people not here who are Black who are in the undergrad; there’s no one here in the masters who are Black, so what am I supposed to do?”

Maxine shared a similar sentiment to Malcolm’s:

As I got here and I developed myself and started to pay attention to what diversity means and what representation means, as a media professional, which is also another predominant White industry, it just started to mean more for me. Not even just in the education environment, but just in general. The impact of being able to see people that look like you and how that proves to you that things can be obtainable and even going down to what kids aspire to be, it’s just so important, and I don’t think I realized that until I was a pre-junior.

Angela shared the perfect statement to sum it up: “You don’t pay attention to it until you experience things.”

Prior to the formal start of the focus group, I had let the students ask me questions about school and my professional path. At some point in the conversation, I mentioned the struggle I had been dealing with over whether to stay on the administrative side or move over to become a faculty member. I shared conversations I had had with other Black faculty and the warnings they had given about the challenge of being a Black faculty member. I relayed the research on how thinly stretched Black faculty often feel at a PWI to support students of color, the “Black Tax,”
and doing work that is not recognized in the tenure process (Cole, 2010; Griffin & Reddick, 2011).

Once the focus group began, I then asked the students whether any of them had considered becoming faculty members due to the lack of Black people in their fields. There was some hesitation around the room. Maxine spoke first and said she had thought about it, more now that she had seen the lack of diversity in the professoriate and how that impacted students and their hesitation to go to college. Summer said maybe one day she would be, and Malcolm said he would think about it after he retired from his career in the tech field. I reminded them how they had just finished telling me to make that professional move because they needed more people who looked like them in the classroom (Museus & Quaye, 2009). It seemed that they were being molded for industry and had not been able to see themselves represented in the faculty, so they did not even consider becoming faculty members.

There is a Black faculty meet-and-greet at the beginning of the academic year that is hosted by the provost, who is a Black male. Summer, who was involved and was connected to a diverse group of faculty and staff, mentioned it was a good opportunity for Black students to connect with the Black faculty on campus. As she was speaking about the event, Richard gave her a look that said, “What are you talking about?” This event is held during new student days and therefore only targeted to new students and current members of student organizations. There is no communication with or marketing to the broader university community. Angela recommended that this event should be offered more than once a year, especially considering the way the curriculum splits the school year for students.
The students realized there were more Black faculty than who they saw on campus on a regular basis. They expressed a desire to see them, meet them, and hear their stories and experiences, regardless of whether they were in the same academic discipline.

**Our Voice Represented on Campus**

The week the interviews were conducted was also the university’s Homecoming Week. About two or three years prior to this study, the university made an effort to bring Homecoming back and build community on campus. The Black students in this study, however, saw Homecoming as a “them-versus-us” event and did not identify with it. The Black students wanted to see themselves represented in the events promoted on campus. Many were part of Black student organizations and had only found out about them through word of mouth. While the university has an online database of student organizations, it has repeatedly been referred to as rubbish.

There is a portal that lists information about all the student organizations, including their e-board, pictures, constitution, contact information, and events. None of the students in this study seemed fond of the portal because it was not easy to navigate and improvements were slow to happen. This frustration led students to not use the page and instead rely on word of mouth and social media to learn about events and organizations. Summer, who was president of a student organization, expressed her frustration:

They only feature the orgs that get a lot of traction to their page so that…we put on events every week for the three months of every quarter, and we’re not featured on that page because our page doesn’t get traction like that.

Angela followed up with,

There is more exposure because everyone’s on social media, as well. Instagram and a lot of Black orgs are…if you don’t follow the Black orgs, you know someone that’s on the e-board is gonna’ repost it on their personal page, so it’s just…even on their story, people are promoting it consistently so people can see it.
The student government is able to get in front of the university Board of Trustees and other senior-level executives to share their voice and make an impact on campus. Unfortunately, mostly White students are members of this student organization. Maxine shared that the university should either create a Black student government or make more of an effort to have Black representation on their executive board to help these students feel a sense of ownership. The support of administration, as well as an understanding of race and campus climate, is necessary for Black students to feel they matter at the university (Love, 1993).

In the individual interviews, I asked all the students if they felt a sense of community on campus. No one gave an assured “yes.” They either said “no” or “kind of.” They generally felt that students had to find or make their own communities. Berger (2002) found that students are more likely to persist when there is a sense of community and a level of consistency across various groups on campus. During the focus group, I asked participants how they defined community. Richard said, “Just as simple as being willing to wear anything with… [the university] gear on”; a few seconds later, he asked for clarification on the school colors. Kim expressed and was affirmed by a few other students that students did not have many positive thoughts about the university.

Code-switching came up during the individual interviews, surprisingly only with female participants. The two male participants never said anything regarding code-switching or inferring the need to change the way they spoke. They all mentioned in some way how they had had to adjust their behaviors and the way they spoke in the classroom, though. Once they brought it up, I would often bring up the term code-switching and probe for more details. Summer, Maxine, and Nikki highlight how their code-switching had caused them to be less vocal in certain situations. Summer shared her fear and frustration:
And I didn’t want to be a stereotype, and I didn’t wanna’ say certain things. And I didn’t wanna’ ... There comes a point, as a student, that you get tired of code-switching, when that’s not really who you are.

Johnson-Ahorlu (2012) echoes the sentiment that students will do anything not to be seen as fulfilling the stereotypes they know exist about them on campus. The students in this study wanted their voices to be heard and respected on campus – their authentic voices, without always having to code-switch. They wanted the administration to support them and encourage efforts around diversity instead of just giving lip service to it, by promoting Black student events and ensuring students felt safe.
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

This study examined Black students’ perceptions of Black faculty at a PWI in an attempt to understand the challenges to and rewards of such interactions. The study’s intent was to capture students’ experiences with Black faculty, but the focus shifted to discussing general support of Black staff and student organizations. Through in-depth conversations with seven Black students, it became evident that there is a lack of Black faculty presence at the research site. Instead of discussing the challenges and rewards of interacting with Black faculty, the conversation became about students’ desires and needs to see and interact with Black faculty. The students imagined what they would want, and through these conversations, the researcher was able to tease out the potential rewards. The participants’ main challenge seemed to be their ability to interact with Black faculty.

From that overall theme, four sub-themes emerged:

- The classroom at a PWI
- Seeing someone who looks like me
- Our voice represented on campus
- Finding support

The CRT tenets of storytelling, Whiteness as property, and racism as ordinary are present in these themes. This study’s findings gave a voice to students who felt they did not have one. The study also highlights some of the disconnect that exists within the research site’s student population, the onboarding process, and engagement in the cooperative-education program. This research is validated by the similarities between the existing literature on the topic and the student interviews for the present study. This study adds to the existing research mainly in its discussion about students’ changing needs as they progress through their education, even when there is a mandatory cooperative-education component designed to give them exposure to real-world work experiences before they graduate. It also explores the experiences of students from
Generation Z, given the current climate of the country. The next step is to share their voices in the hope that they can impact change.

**Experiences with Black Faculty**

The participants expressed a lack of Black faculty present on campus. Some have seen none in their programs, while others may have seen one or two, but even then, they reported having limited exposure to and interactions with them. Those who have been able to interact with Black faculty shared their experiences in the classroom, but none of the students seemed to have connections with Black faculty outside the classroom. The interactions students experienced outside the classroom occurred mainly with Black staff and student organizations, which allowed them to create their own sense of community on campus.

**The Classroom at a PWI**

Regardless of faculty or staff status, the students felt there was a lack of diversity on campus. Ideally, they would have liked to see an equal proportion of Black students to Black faculty relative to the various majors. Some of the students interviewed had seen none in their program of study, while others had seen only a few.

Black students’ experiences at PWIs can be uncomfortable (Love, 1993). Not only do they feel ignored or shut out from aspects of campus life, if they come from predominantly Black areas, they may also experience a culture shock. Entering a new environment may make them more aware of their racial and ethnic identities than they were before (Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013). Summer and Kim both noted this challenge. Kim specifically noted the culture shock she felt in her first class, being the only Black student in class (McCoy, 2014; Museus & Quaye, 2009): “I was the only Black person in the class, and they were just like, “Wow.” This is very
drastic from coming from a high school where everybody in my class was Black, including some of the professors and teachers.”

Most of the students in the study had experienced microaggressions in the classroom from White faculty. The condescending nature of these exchanges changed the way students saw themselves (McCoy et al., 2015). Summer was encouraged to annunciate her words, forcing her to code-switch and speak with a more American accent and focusing less on her Jamaican heritage. In a prison-based class, Nikki felt that because her viewpoint was different from the instructor’s and that she was speaking on behalf of the inmates in the class, she was not called on and was no longer able to participate in class discussion even though she wanted to. These experiences seem to be similar to what Johnson-Ahorlu (2012) and Love (1993) note as faculty expressing their “racist beliefs” by ignoring students or expressing their feelings in harsh ways. Even though the students described them as microaggressions, there is evidence that the White faculty were dismissive of the students’ cultural and racial identities (McCoy et al., 2015).

Some of the students referenced one Black male faculty member in the sociology department. One of the courses he teaches is around race and ethnicity. For the Black students, he seemed to have created an environment in the classroom they found comfortable and engaging (Gurin et al., 2002). The interaction with a Black faculty member allowed for a more relatable experience (Adams, 2005). Summer said that the information he was able to provide, like articles and his own life experiences, was probably more than they would have received from a White faculty member:

The impact was that much more valuable…he wasn’t afraid to have those conversations. And I think at times when people are not of color, and they’re leading a class that’s very discussion-based that are talking about inequalities and things like that, they are afraid to talk about certain topics. And I don’t think that benefits anyone at the end of the day.
Adams (2005) recommends that Africana studies courses provide a safe space for students to discuss race and develop pride in their culture and identity. It is a place where Black authors should be taught and students’ views should be challenged to help them develop their identity. Unfortunately, it does not seem that is completely true at the university. Nikki and Kim both referenced Africana studies at the university, stating that it was not offered enough and that when it was offered, it was late at night and filled up quickly because so many students wanted to get in. Kim even questioned who was enrolled in the class that might have prevented her from getting in previously, because she quickly noticed once she got in that there were more White students than she had expected to see. At the time of the interviews, she had just started the class, so she was not able to fully reflect on the impact of having a Black professor teaching the course in the same way that Summer was able to do with the sociology professor. Nevertheless, there is power in knowledge and lived experiences. While allies can speak with a degree of empathy, diversity in the classroom really comes from individuals who have lived experiences. It is important not to make these individuals the spokespeople for everything Black, but to embrace their knowledge and stories and encourage their voices so students will embrace their own stories and share their unique voices.

The classroom is the most dominant space at a university because that is where the learning happens and it represents the primary reason students are there. Students need to feel safe and protected to allow their learning to flourish, but they also need a place to go if they feel violated or confused about an interaction. In my conversation with Kim, she mentioned a shirt that was commonly associated with the Republican party. I was not aware of this shirt, but it came up again in the focus group and everyone knew exactly what she was talking about. In that conversation, participants made comments about feeling unsafe and having to watch their backs.
While students can wear what they want and have freedom of speech, faculty and staff must be able to employ a level of intervention. Otherwise, the idea that racism is ordinary is perpetuated. White students felt comfortable wearing their shirts because they probably had not been challenged. They subsequently felt comfortable speaking aggressively, apparently with no faculty intervention. Summer discussed her experience with the president of the Trump student organization in class: “The things that were coming out of his mouth compared to the topics of sociology in regards to talk about race, sexuality, all those things…it was blasphemy.”

Integrating a critical race perspective into the classroom can help create a safe space for dialogue and may even start to build a community in the classroom (Patton et al., 2007; Schreiner, 2010).

Training faculty to be in the classroom should also be examined. Regardless of their races, faculty and staff must be aware of their racial identities and how they influence their interactions with others (Patton et al., 2007). If faculty use a colorblind approach, they may do more harm than good by making Black students feel disempowered or as if they do not exist (McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Implementing a critical race perspective may help faculty understand the complexities of race and how actions and inactions can be disadvantageous to Black students’ progress (Patton et al., 2007). Faculty also must be aware of the broader issues happening on campus, especially those impacting the retention of Black students. Academics is not the only reason students leave. Students’ negative interactions around campus, even with faculty, can impact whether or not they stay and even their commitment as alumni to the university (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Trainings can be developed to teach faculty how to handle discrimination in the classroom (Braxton et al., 2000; Gloria et al., 1999; Wang, 2012).
**Finding Support**

Finding support and a sense of community can have a positive impact on retention. McCoy (2014), Ovink and Veazey (2011), and Winograd and Rust (2014) recommend connecting students to communities of social support to help them normalize their experiences. Student participants in this study who were connected, like through City Scholars and business support program, noted a better, smoother transition into the university. While most of the students came from more diverse high schools, a few expressed feeling culture shock when they were the only Black students in their classes during their first term (McCoy, 2014). Due to the lack of Black faculty, students found support in other Black and staff members of color, as well as in student organizations. Most participants spoke of at least one person who had supported and motivated them at the university (Gloria et al., 1999; Sweat et al., 2013).

Richard, Kim, Nikki, and Maxine were connected to communities on campus prior to their first day of class as freshmen. Kim was part of a summer bridge program with about 30 other students from a variety of backgrounds. Even though she was from an area close to campus, she still felt homesick. She noted that one of the program’s staff members, a Black male, and I helped her overcome those feelings and become engaged on campus (McCoy, 2014). Kim mentioned meeting a few students (females of color) during the summer program, and almost four years later, they are still friends. Doan (2015) notes that the college experience is enhanced when students connect with peers from diverse backgrounds. While the summer program is not race-based, it is still an important program on campus to help students feel connected early. There may be value in exploring a summer bridge program for students of color; Love (1993) asserts that bridge programs should be part of retention models for Black students at PWIs to assist with their transition.
Nikki and Maxine were part of the City Scholars program, which provides full tuition and fees scholarship to attend the university. Even though some students in the program may know each other from high school, they meet new people in the program. The scholarship is for students who graduated within the city, where Black people make up more than half of the overall population. The population of students with this scholarship is diverse, given that Black people make up just under 50% of the population; in some respects, the diversity within this program may be overrepresented in comparison to the rest of the university. Regardless, the students live together in a living-learning community on campus their first year, where they participate in workshops and presentations from departments around on campus connecting them to important and useful resources. This program helps with retention as well as filling in cultural capital gaps the students may have (Astin, 1999; Mehta, Newbold, & O’Rourke, 2011). Richard had a similar experience, being part of the business program for students of color, which started virtually connecting students before they arrived as freshmen, making it easier for them to connect during their first face-to-face meetings. These three programs are vital because they connect students to services on campus about which they may not otherwise learn (Winograd & Rust, 2014).

The participants all said they did not necessarily feel a sense of community when they started at the university. They may have found their individual communities, but as a whole, the University does not support a community atmosphere. While none of them expressed feeling unwelcome, being connected to a community can help create a sense of belonging and ensure students are connected to supports throughout their time at the university (Love, 1993; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). We did not discuss whether any of the participants had ever thought about
leaving. I believe their involvement on campus, as well as the connections and communities they were able to build, have had a direct effect on them staying (Allen et al., 2007; Astin, 1999).

There is a “multicultural center” on campus that is not well-publicized and is potentially underused. Only one student, Summer, was completely familiar with the space. The other students may have heard about it, but they had the impression that it was only for specific groups and not open to all students. The center was designed to create a safe space, allowing students to explore their individual identities and the intersections of their multiple identities (Doan, 2015). Location may be a hindrance, since it is located in the basement of a building to which students do not have to come. The building houses one of the campus cafeterias; the second cafeteria is closer to the residence halls and more popular among students. The bookstore and university identification office are also located in the building, which are both places students do not need to frequent on a regular basis. In addition to the multicultural center being in the basement, the majority of the other academic support centers on campus are in the basement of university buildings. Doan (2015) encourages university officials to be more strategic in the placement of support centers, as it may send a message to students that they are not supposed to interact with these different groups or that the spaces are not important. The use of support centers, including academic spaces, can increase retention and ensure that more students graduate on time (Winograd & Rust, 2014).

Safe spaces can also be Black faculty, staff, or student organizations that create an environment where people of color can be their authentic selves and share their stories, triumphs, and frustrations (Doan, 2015; Griffin, 2012; McCoy, 2014; Reddick, 2011). Getting Black students connected quickly to other Black students on campus can help them normalize their experiences at a PWI and build resiliency to persist (Baber, 2012; Ovink & Veazey, 2011). This
theme was most prominent in Summer’s story. She was not initially connected to any programs when she started at the university, and as a result, she struggled to find herself and her identity. She said, “I was not thriving. But, again, I have a lot of tenacity, so you find your community or you make it, and I was not gonna’ leave here without making it.” The result for her was that she was able to connect with Black staff on campus who helped her navigate and connect with professional networks.

The counseling center should be another safe space on campus (Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013). Unfortunately for Nikki, it did not feel safe. Seeking counseling is taboo in the Black community, so she stepped out of her comfort zone to do so. She was opening up about her past, only to feel that she was being set up so the counselor could use it against her: “It’s like he was asking me the questions, setting me up to answer these questions in a way...I’m already stepping out of my comfort zone by even seeking counseling.” While this profession is probably the most trained on the campus to help students with their emotional and psychological challenges, there still seems to be a need for cultural awareness training. It does not send a positive message, especially to Black students, that they are able to share their stories without judgement and fear of consequence.

There are many attributes in creating a safe and supportive environment for Black students at PWIs. In some cases, this support may be their primary connection to other Black individuals on campus due to the lack of Black faculty. Some of the attributes include opportunities to interact and develop relationships with Black faculty in an informal setting, such as mixers; offer culturally responsive tutoring for students; and provide more culturally relevant programming supported by Black faculty and staff on campus (Love, 1993; Maramba & Velasquez, 2012).
Seeing Someone Who Looks Like Me

The primary focus of this research was to understand how Black students at a PWI experienced Black faculty. The responses were varied, but most of the participants did not have any experiences outside of the classroom. As upper-division students, they all expressed wanting to see someone who looked like them on campus, regardless of faculty status or even discipline. They wanted to see what was possible for them to achieve as they began to think about their professional lives after graduation.

None of the students mentioned seeing White faculty as role models for them (Love, 1993). Maxine mentioned how she was able to network with faculty for research and employment opportunities, but she did not describe the relationship beyond that. She believed she needed to tell “the universe in general what you want, and it’ll reward you.” She came from a low-income background and feared that she would be wrongfully judged by White faculty if they knew, but she felt that a Black faculty member would be less judgmental and more able to relate to her. Having Black faculty and staff more present on campus can create a more trusting and comfortable environment through common cultural and racial backgrounds with students (Doan, 2015; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

Interestingly, the women in the study used the word mentor, whereas the men used other words to describe the mentor relationship. This phenomenon relates to Gibbons and Woodside’s (2014) study, which stated that women found mentorship more important in their college journey for the opportunities it could lead to. While relationships may be characterized differently, such as mentor or friendly, Black faculty feel closer to their Black students. A maternal instinct occurs because of the challenges they know students will face (Griffin, 2013), which can create the “other mother” effect.
Maxine referred to the university coffee shop employee she connected with as her other mother. Other mothers are vital in the Black community for supporting Black children. In the academic setting, educated Black women are seen as leaders and motivators. This relationship extends beyond mentoring; rather, it is Black women giving a bit of themselves to help facilitate the development of Black students. This symbol of power has a positive impact on Black student outcomes, as well; not only do students see someone who looks like them, but they know this person is invested in them and only wants to see them succeed (Hill Collins, 2000; Griffin, 2013).

The identity-development process begins to occur in college for most students (Baber, 2012). Summer, who came from a predominantly Black area, had challenges finding her identity upon entering the university. Through participation in culturally based student organizations, she began learning about her ethnic identity (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). Allowing Black students on campus to see faculty and staff who look like them can help them navigate the discovery of their identities. Black faculty can serve as mediators, exposing students to behaviors they can replicate to help them increase their socialization (Museus & Quaye, 2009). While only Summer mentioned having issues with her identity as a mixed student, if she had been able to see someone who looked like her, she may have taken a different path. She commented that she regretted joining a White sorority, which was a decision she made because at the time she thought it was a better fit.

One way Black students at the university can see themselves is through the Black faculty meet-and-greet in early fall. One challenge is that the event is promoted to new students and student leaders. It gives new students a chance to start interacting with faculty in the hope that it creates instant satisfaction with the university (Astin, 1999). One possible reason Black students
feel they do not see Black faculty throughout the school year could be the “Black tax.” Malcolm had an experience with “gender tax” with the White female faculty member with whom he conducted research. Tax is the expectation that Black or female faculty are in more demand from students because of their underrepresentation due to their race or gender in academia (Griffin & Reddick, 2011).

Student participants also brought up the behavior of code-switching as one they could have learned to navigate better with more exposure to Black faculty and staff. Female participants mentioned code-switching and establishing a second persona, mostly due to suggestions from White faculty. Maxine and Summer both gave examples that showed how, at times, they had to background their primary identity to assimilate (Briscoe, 2005). Maxine shared,

[Black people] are easier to talk to. I don’t have to switch my voice up or increase my vocabulary, ‘cause they’re not worried about that stuff. But I feel like that’s some of the things you have to do when you’re speaking to people that aren’t of color.

The students who talked about code-switching viewed it as something they needed to do to be professional and not be judged for being different. Summer mentioned being tired of always having to switch. She demonstrated frustration at White students not “getting it” and always having to explain everything (Payne & Suddler, 2014).

The student participants shared a common wish to build a connection with Black faculty and professionals through mentoring. Being close to graduation, they were all looking for opportunities for professional development that were relevant for them as Black students in their fields of choice (Morewood et al., 2010). At this point, they needed more developmental support to help them translate their vision of their professional selves (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). There are benefits to creating a mentorship program for Black
students and faculty. It can provide motivation for Black students to complete their degrees and also provide support, a place to make friends, and a way to find a sense of community on campus, allowing them to maintain their identity (Brittian et al., 2009; Luedke, 2017).

Connecting Black students to Black mentors can also create a pipeline to the professoriate.

**Our Voice Represented on Campus**

The CRT tenet of storytelling, also known as the unique voice of color, holds that those from oppressed backgrounds “may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 11). The challenge is creating a space and opportunity for the Black students to have their voices heard by the administrators who have the power to effect change. The administration sees retention and persistence numbers, but they likely do not hear directly from the Black students to understand the why behind their circumstances (Love, 1993). During the focus group, students said they did not feel they had a voice when decisions were made on campus, which could be part of the reason why none of them felt a broader sense of community (Berger & Braxton, 1998).

During new student days, the week before the start of the new academic year, the University plans a week full of activities and workshops presented by various offices around campus. It is an attempt to introduce certain policies and expectations and help students make meaning of the institution’s values and goals (Berger, 2002). It is done in a broad way that does not necessarily take into consideration new students’ diverse backgrounds in an attempt to help them feel included. No activities directly address the challenges Black students and students of color will face at a PWI and point them to resources specifically for them. From the beginning, Black students are set up to feel excluded.
Whiteness as property is the notion that White people have privilege because of their skin color and they are the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998). When that privilege is flaunted and not acknowledged, it changes the climate, especially for Black students. University officials need to acknowledge this privilege and be aware of the impact it has on students (Patton et al., 2007). These officials are the people with power who make final decisions, but this group rarely includes women and people of color, who often possess limited power on college campuses (Patton et al., 2007). When asked about what they needed from administrators like me, Malcolm said people like me should not be required to do something, but that action should be pushed down from higher-level administrators.

The campus climate could be better, though nothing has escalated to the level of headlines from Missouri and the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. There was an incident with a faculty member’s social media presence a few years ago that made national headlines. As a result of the incident, Richard noticed fellow students becoming bolded online:

Very controversial opinions, but I feel like they’re more willing to put that online, still representing themselves and the school, but I’m not gonna’ say that to you in a coffee shop. But you’ll be damn sure they’ll tweet or Facebook, anything, MySpace. I definitely noticed a shift online within the [university] community.

Anything can happen at any moment, and it is important for university faculty, staff, and students to feel prepared and protected. Many steps must be taken, such as addressing the inequalities within the higher-education system, as well as any racial and ethnic conflicts that happen on campus (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Harper et al., 2009). Patton et al. (2017) mention that Black people need to be brought to the center of conversations around creating a community where everyone’s experiences are validated. The student participants in this study also highlighted that need.
Study participants reported that the student government on campus had no Black representation at the time of the interviews. This organization is viewed by students as the decision-makers and the voice of the undergraduate student body. Unfortunately, with no diversity on the board, Black students do not feel their voices are accurately represented. The student government has a direct connection to university administrators and are able to get in front of them and share feedback and ideas.

Black students must be provided with opportunities to participate in decision-making on campus, as well (Berger, 2002), whether it happens by creating a separate student government for Black undergraduates, just as there is a separate one at the graduate level, or the administration creates structured town halls and roundtable discussions to hear what Black students have to say. I learned much in the conversations I had with participants. While sometimes I had to tease out personal gripes from valid points, study participants shared well-constructed arguments and frustrations. Their overwhelming wish was that there were more Black faculty on campus. They understood that there were more than they saw on a regular basis, which presented a challenge of how to make those faculty more present and connected with the Black students. This problem offers a perfect opportunity for research on this topic from the faculty standpoint, including they challenges they face, whether they want to connect with students, and whether they have the bandwidth to do so.

Practitioner and Scholarly Significance

The biggest shift I see in my positionality is one of advocacy on behalf of students. After all my conversations with students, I see the need to be more present on campus and hear the students. I am positioned in a way that now I can bring the message to a senior-level executive, who is also a Black woman, and see a higher possibility of action happening. Before this study,
that comfort level did not exist. I also realized I need to share my story more. I never thought of my story as extraordinary; I have always seen it as rather boring. But it is important, regardless of how I feel about it, to share because it will connect on some level with Black students and help me build stronger bonds with them.

In my positionality statement, I reference Jacobs (2016) and how she shifted from researcher to facilitator and educator to ally. I knew I needed to be mindful of this same challenge during my research. I definitely felt that shift and held back a lot. There were many times when I wanted to play a mentor role to student participants, but I was aware of it and stopped myself. Before we started the focus-group discussion, I let the students ask me questions to balance the give-and-take and not have their curiosity interfere with the actual research. In some ways, I think this step helped enhance the research. I shared with them my indecisiveness about staying an administrator or becoming a faculty member and, because it fit and flowed with the conversation, I was able to ask the students about their ambitions regarding becoming faculty. It helped create a light moment during the conversation. My positionality statement reaffirmed that I need to turn this research into action on campus by having more focused discussions with Black students and finding ways to make their voices heard on campus so they feel supported by the university and become active and engaged alumni.

My hypothesis was that the lack of Black faculty impacted the Black student experience at a PWI. Having 20 years of experience as a student and staff member at the research site, I continue to see the lack of Black professionals around campus. Luckily, I have been able to grow my network through various committees and projects, and in doing so, I find people who I may not have met otherwise. However, from the student perspective, in part because the curriculum is so structured, they may not have the opportunity to expand their networks beyond their
programs. Study participants perceived a lack of Black faculty and Black professionals on campus. While this research focused on faculty, participants generally wanted to see more Black professionals on campus, someone that they could look up to and who could serve as a mentor and guide. This research helps make the case that for the Black students who are at this university, there must be a way to make Black professionals’ presence known. While the university has shared its efforts to recruit more people of color throughout the university, the challenge remains to make these professionals more accessible to students to help uplift them. As professionals, we must do a better job of reaching back and helping to guide students. These results meet the study’s desired outcomes and provides other action items.

Through this study, I saw immediate implications for my professional work. Summer politely called me out about only having a conversation like this for my dissertation and brought to light the need to have this conversation more broadly and frequently. I manage a program that is built to connect faculty of all ethnicities to students of color, so I need to make sure I do a better job of connecting with professional groups for faculty and staff of color on campus, although most people who attend those events are the ones students already see on campus. My ultimate goal is to ensure students have a voice and are heard on campus. I want to be an advocate on their behalf.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were a few limitations to this study. One was the small number of student interviews; only six students participated, which represents a tiny portion of the whole population at the university. Though they were a diverse group of students, I would have liked a few more students to participate, especially from engineering and nursing, which are two of the university’s biggest majors. Beyond being a small representation of the university, this research
was conducted at one research site. The results should be reviewed carefully for context at other universities because of certain factors like curriculum and location.

Another limitation was that this study presents point-in-time data. The students had to reflect on their experiences. If there had been more time, this study could have been conducted over three to four years to get more in-the-moment feedback. It is easy to forget more nuanced occurrences after three or four years.

**Recommendations and Next Steps**

The data uncovered in this research can be used to make changes and help me become a true change agent. Based on the student feedback, there is an opportunity to collaborate with the student government to provide a unique voice for students of color and decrease the ownership White students have on campus. It may start with just a town hall, specifically for Black students and students of color. The Black faculty and staff meet-and-greet was also mentioned as a great opportunity to hear stories from Black faculty and staff, but the timing was not good for all students. Angela recommended keeping the fall event but adding one in the spring to reach upper-class students, especially those preparing for graduation. While it may be too late to make a change for current seniors, if the meet-and-greet becomes an annual event, it will not be too late for future seniors.

Formalizing a mentoring program takes significant effort, but it may be possible to expand the ones that currently exist or encourage students to develop their own mentor relationships at the meet-and-greets. One challenge the current mentor program faces is finding time that works for all students to be engaged with each other and faculty and staff. Malcolm recommended creating a podcast or something similar that introduces Black faculty and staff to students, which would help bring their stories to students in an accessible and convenient format.
The benefits to this approach are that faculty and staff can share their stories in a format that will reach more students, faculty and staff can create their own level of commitment so if they want to engage with students they can tell students how to reach them, and it can begin to put into context the potential of Black students entering the professoriate.

While I am sure there will be resistance to this idea, another recommendation may be to create a webpage for students, staff, and faculty of color to outline safe spaces, whether it be through the center that exists or through individuals who offer it themselves. Most importantly, to Malcom and Summer’s point, it would create a web presence that allows students to see Black faculty on campus and hear about their research.

Next steps regarding research can go a variety of ways. Black faculty members’ experiences can be captured in a kind of response to this study. It would also be interesting to capture the response of White faculty who work with Black students, which may add to the conversation and create a stronger argument for creating change that begins to dismantle the notion of Whiteness of property and to ensure the curriculum takes into account learners’ diversity while helping White faculty understand that racism should not be ordinary and that we must stand up for Black students who feel singled out or shut out in their courses.

The work that must be done now is to find Black faculty on campus to partner with to host presentations and workshops based on the student participants’ recommendations. I have been charged with creating a professional development series, and this study will help define what that looks like.
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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Hello (student),

As you may know, I am currently pursuing my doctorate at Northeastern University. The topic I will be exploring for my dissertation will be on the experience that Black students have at a predominantly white institution, or PWI, and the impact that the presence of Black faculty have on that experience. The research will explore campus climate, ethnic identity, and utilization of resources.

I am looking for Black students who are at least in their third year (pre-junior/junior) to participate in one 60-90 minute individual interview followed by a focus group discussion.

If you are interested in participating, please complete this brief survey so that I can capture your interest as well as a few additional background details. You will be notified by (date) on your selection status at which time the individual meeting will be set up. The focus group discussion will be set up at the conclusion of the individual discussions to take place in the early winter.

As a thank you for participating, selected participants will be entered into a raffle to win a $50 gift card to Cinemark theaters with locations within blocks of campus.

If at any point you have an questions, please do not hesitate to email me at gardner.ta@husky.neu.edu or on my mobile at 222-222-2222.

Thank you for your interest.

Tasha Gardner

EdD Candidate
APPENDIX B: INVITATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your interest in volunteering to participate in this study. The research will be on the experience that Black students have at a predominantly white institution and how the presence of Black faculty impacts that. During the individual interview, we will explore topics such as identity formation, engagement on campus, interactions with Black faculty, and campus climate. Selected participants will be notified by (DATE).

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at gardner.ta@husky.neu.edu or 222-222-2222.

I understand that by completing this survey, I am expressing my interest in serving as a volunteer for this research project. (required check box)

First & Last Name
Email Address
Phone Number
Major
Class Standing

- What type of high school did you graduate from? Public, private (non-religious), parochial or religious based, home school, other
- Would you classify your high school as a predominantly white institution? Yes, no, unsure
- How would you describe the area you grew up in? suburb, urban/city, rural, other
- Please list the student organizations you are part of. If you are not in any, you can simply enter N/A.
- Do you currently, or have you in the past, lived in university housing, including campus properties such as Chestnut Square? Yes or No
- Have you ever participated in research on campus? Yes or No
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

What is this study about?
The purpose of this study is to understand the experience that Black students have at a predominantly white institution and how that experience is impacted by the presence of Black faculty. The hypothesis is that the lack of Black faculty impacts the engagement of Black students.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate you will be interviewed individually and then participate in a small group focus discussion. The interview will ask questions about your engagement at the university, your experience with Black faculty, your impression of the campus climate, and how this has impacted your identity formation.

Where will this take place and how much of my time is needed?
The individual interviews and focus group discussion will both take place on campus. Both will take place in a public university spot that will also allow for privacy such as a conference room or office. Living locations will not be used.
- The individual interview will take 60 - 90 minutes at an agreed upon time and campus location.
- The small group focus discussion will take place in a small conference room on campus for no more than two hours at a time that works for the majority of the research participants. If you are unable to make the small group discussion, we can set up a time to meet and discuss further.

Are there any risks or benefits to me?
There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. No risks are anticipated as a result of participating in this study other than those you may face in your daily life. There will be questions asked about your experience that may make you uncomfortable. Your honest responses will help us learn more about the challenges and motivation of Black students so that we can better serve and support you.

Is there any compensation?
There is no individual compensation. All participants will be entered into a drawing for a $50 gift card to Cinemark Theaters.

Who will see my information?
Your responses will be kept private and confidential. Your name or other identifiable information will not be included in any written reports. Files will be kept in a locked file that only the researcher will have access to. All records will be retained for five years in adherence to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements.

What if I change my mind about participating?
Taking part in this study is strictly voluntary. If a question is asked that you are not comfortable answering, you can skip that question. If you decide for whatever reason that you no longer want to participate, you are free to do so. Just let the researcher know so that your information can be
removed from the study. No punitive action will be taken and this will not impact your campus standing in any way.

**Who can I contact if I have any additional questions?**
If you have any questions about this study please contact Tasha Gardner at 222-222-2222 or by email at gardner.ta@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Kristal Clemons at k.clemons@neu.edu. For questions regarding your rights in this research, you may contact Kate Skophammer, IRB Coordinator at 617-390-3450 or k.skophammer@neu.edu.

**Statement of consent:** I have read the above information and have received answers to any of my questions. By signing this form I agree to take part in this research.

___________________________________________  __________________
Signature of participant                        Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of participant

___________________________________________  __________________
Signature of researcher/interviewer           Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of researcher/interviewer
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL EXAMPLE

Interviewee:

Interviewer:

RESEARCH QUESTION: How do Black students at a predominantly white institution perceive their experience with Black faculty?

Part I:

Introductory Session Objectives (5-7 minutes):

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because as current student at a predominantly white institution I want to hear directly from you about your experience here. My research project focuses on the experience of Black students at a predominantly white institution, such as this one. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into the experience Black students have in relation to Black faculty at a predominantly white institution. Hopefully this will allow me to identify recommendations for the university to increase the visibility of Black faculty and begin build connections with Black students. Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to video record our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [if yes, thank the participant, let them know you may ask the question again as you start recording, and then turn on the recording equipment]. I may also write a few notes as we speak. The recording and my notes will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used when quoting our conversation. The recording will not be duplicated and will be destroyed once they are fully transcribed. (To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me [provide the form* - note there is no actual form for this class project]. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm.) Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used? This interview should last up to 90 minutes during which time I have a series of questions I would like to discuss. If time begins to run short, I may interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part II: Interviewee Background (5-10 minutes)

A. Interviewee Background
1) Tell me about yourself:

- Where did you grow up?
- What was your high school like? Was it similar or different to this institution? In what ways? Probe for racial diversity and socioeconomic status
- Why did you choose to come to this institution? What year and major are you? Have you changed majors, and if so why?
- What do you hope to do after graduation? (if you do not know that is fine)

B. Main Questions

One of the things I am interested in learning about is your experience with Black faculty at a predominantly white institution. I would like to hear if you have had interactions with Black faculty whether it be inside or out of the classroom. If not, then I'd like to hear your suggestions for ensuring students are able to connect with Black faculty. This next series of questions will ask about your experiences. If you mention other people, I will give them pseudonym's in the written transcript to protect their privacy as well.

1) What were your expectations about the number of Black faculty who you would see and/or interact with at the university?
   a. What about the number of Black faculty who may teach you?

2) Is it important for you to see Black faculty? Why or why not?

3) Have you had any Black faculty teach any of your classes at the university? Any other minority faculty?
   a. If yes. Was there a difference in the environment of the classroom in comparison to non-Black faculty who teach?
   b. If no.

4) Discuss if you have experienced any racism, stereotypes, or microaggressions in the classroom. (provide definitions of each)
a. Did the instructor address it? Did you address it? Did it change the environment in the classroom?

5) Would you prefer to have more or less Black faculty teach you? Or do you have enough? Why or why not?

6) Have you had experience with Black faculty who did not teach you in class? Please discuss that experience.

7) What type of interactions and opportunities would you want with Black faculty on campus outside of the classroom?

8) Please discuss the supports you have been able to receive on campus?

9) Do you feel a sense of community on campus? In what ways do or don’t you?

10) Is there anything you think the university can do to improve the presence of Black faculty on campus?

CLOSING: I’d like to thank you for your time today. Do you have any questions?
APPENDIX E: FOCUS-GROUP PROTOCOL

- Opportunity to ask me questions as we wait for a few more students to come in before we get started.
- Ground rules:
  - Most of this is based from conversations I had with you all last week. So it may seem repetitive. But it will also allow for different perspectives, which is why I’m addressing it again, for my own curiosity. Please do not feel targeted, there is no need to admit it was based on our conversation as in most cases it was based on multiple conversations.
  - Safe space. We are in a location where not easy to listen, etc. I want you to be open and honest.
- Introductions
  - Name, major, year
  - Brief description of where you are from and the type of high school you went to
- Questions
  - Most of you mentioned that when you first arrived at Drexel that it was not important to see Black faculty initially, but now it is, why?
  - Have any of you thought about becoming faculty?
  - How does being an only play out in the classroom for you?
  - When did you realize you were racially/ethnically different?
  - Do you want a community? What do you want from a community?
  - What are the safe spaces on campus you go to?
  - How would you describe the coming of age with Obama vs. now with Trump?
  - What role has your academic advisor played in your journey at Drexel?
  - For those in student orgs, what is the importance of the advisor role?
  - In what ways do you want to share your voice? Round tables like this, one on one conversations with different administrators?