She Just Did: A Narrative Case Study of Black Women Student Leaders at A Predominantly White Midwestern Institution

by

Teara Flagg Lander

B.S., University of Central Oklahoma, 2008
M.Ed., University of Oklahoma, 2009

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this narrative case study was to explore the lived experiences of four Black undergraduate collegiate women leaders in higher education in their third and fourth years of study in a predominantly White Midwestern institution. This qualitative study was conducted with purposeful and criterion-based sampling. The participants selected needed to be at least a student leader in a registered student organization at one time during their collegiate career. Narrative inquiry was used to explore the participants' racialized, gendered, and leadership identity development prior to college and throughout the course of their collegiate careers. The participants' narratives were organized using Bildungsroman format, or as a coming of age story.

Findings indicate that although the participants identified as Black women and Black women student leaders, their racialized identity was much more salient than their gendered identity. Therefore, outside of biological markers like menstruating and becoming mothers, they were not able to articulate the development of their intersectional identity. Findings also show the participants had a certain amount of self-confidence and critical self-awareness that allowed them to succeed even when faced with racialized and gendered discrimination as individuals and within their roles as student leaders. Such obstacles contributed to their ability to *just do* when faced with challenges regardless of the difficulty level of the challenge.

The study raises implications about the multitude of support systems that Black women and girls have upon entering college. Another implication is the amount of invisible labor that Black women as collegiate leaders do in order to support their fellow peers. Finally, this study raises implications about the deficit narratives that depict Black women's and girls' stories within education. Thus, this study presented a counternarrative to the traditional, negative, and

stereotypical narratives that are untrue and detrimental to the racialized, gendered, and leadership

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Approved by:

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

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Dedication

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Historically, Black women's narratives have been marginalized by mainstream discourses (Collins, 2000). Even within Black literature, a privilege is given to Black men's narratives (Collins, 2000). However, this is not to state that anyone's suffering or pain is any less to another's, but more spaces need to be created to highlight Black women's narratives from a celebratory perspective, instead of a perspective of deviance or deficit. Deviance or deficit perspectives include stories that show Black people, and in this case Black women, to be a failure in various institutions, requiring saving from the same institutions that oppressed them (Ladson-Billings, 2012). Issues that support this narrative are the school-to-prison pipeline, presence of few Black women in predominantly White educational spaces, and the network of power structures that reinforce conditions for deficit. All of these issues are discussed in depth in the section titled *Overview of Issues* later in this chapter.

The above-mentioned reasons call for creating and proliferating scholarship that moves our discussion beyond deficit thinking to celebratory discourses where the accomplishments of a marginalized group are presented as counternarratives to dominant discourses. In this study, that marginalized group is Black women in student leadership positions at a Midwestern public university.

To discuss the background and context of this study, the following topics are explored further: Black men and women students in higher education, Identity Theory, Black women's identities, leadership identity development, school-to-prison pipeline, presence of Black women in predominantly White institutions, and leadership experiences of Black women students. This study is framed through the lenses of Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought, and Leadership Identity Development Model.

Overview of the Issues

Black women have been targeted by law enforcement and White supremacists for centuries (Segal, 1997). Once seen as leverage to attack the Black family and the Black man, the rape and mistreatment of Black women has been used as a tool (Collins, 2000). As years progressed, Black women have gained more independence from the Black man but their bodies have continued to be degraded and treated as objects for others (Collins, 2000). To understand these issues, a discussion of the history of violence against Black bodies is offered.

Hallam (2004) reported the history of slavery and the making of America on the backs of Black people. Black people have been murdered at the hands of White people since the slave trades began in the 16th century. The count of Black murders has varied with each era of Black development in America (Hallam, 2004). During slavery, the count of African murders is estimated to be about 6 million, killed while midway from Africa to the U.S. (Muhammad, 2003). It is estimated, "at least 2 million Africans--10 to 15 percent--died during the infamous 'Middle Passage' across the Atlantic. Another 15 to 30 percent died during the march to confinement along the coast" (Stobaugh, 2014, p. 92). The statistics create the narrative of the dehumanization of Black bodies, the owning and selling of Black people as if they were cattle for sale, a precedent of unequal status as human beings. Due to the inequity, for White slave owners to gain more influence, they lobbied that the slave over the age of 25 be considered three-fifths of a man under the three-fifths clause (Finkelman, 2013). This legal change allowed the wealthy slave owners with more slaves to receive more benefits and power, but also marked the first time Black people, specifically men, had value legally. However, the mentality of Black lives being considered as three-fifths of a man and less than human persisted and fueled the rise of White supremacists (Banks, 2009). As the beginning of the 20th century brought change,

Black people were required to abide by the laws of the land but did not receive equal treatment (Equal Justice Initiative, 2014). With time, racial tensions and racially motivated crimes continued. One of the largest eras of resilience displayed by Black people was the civil rights movement. Although Black people were actively fighting for justice and equality, the killing of Black people maintained (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2015). The civil rights movement brought about changes like education accessibility, voting rights, and the use of public facilities. Unfortunately, the civil rights movement was only a stepping-stone toward equality for Black people in America.

Today, Black men, women, and children continue to be murdered by White supremacists and law enforcement (Fields, 2015). The number of murders by law enforcement has sparked a new era of Black people seeking justice and equality. In a digital age, the presence of social media and cellular phones capable of recording as well as police car cameras have been helpful in highlighting injustices against Black men, women, and children (Morrison, 2015). However, 197 Black people have been killed by the police between January 2015 through August 2015. Of those killings, only three resulted in the officer being charged with a crime (Mapping Police Violence, 2015). Outside of police inequity, White supremacists and others who view the Black body as a threat have contributed to the increase of Black murders (Fields, 2015). In the past three years, Black people have been murdered while attending church (Ellis, Payne, Perez, & Ford, 2015), playing with toys (Trexler, 2015), and playing their music while driving (Solotaroff, 2013). Black people have been killed 3.28 times higher than White people since Michael Brown's death in August 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, and the number continues to grow (Fields, 2015). Consequently, the inequity directed toward all Black people has created a strong

foundation for the Black Lives Matter movement (Garza, Tometi, & Cullors, n.d.b), but limited coverage has included Black women.

The Black Lives Matter movement was started by three Black women after the death of Trayvon Martin in 2013 (Garza et al., n.d.b). The women came together with varying interests, representing a multitude of identities within the Black community, including immigrant, mother, daughter, sister, and much more. The movement has brought awareness to the plight of Black people in general and made a purposeful effort to emphasize all Black people, specifically Black women and girls who have not historically been at the forefront of Black movements. Since the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement, attention has been brought to the injustices enacted towards Black women, Black trans women, and Black girls (Chatelain & Asoka, 2015).

As injustices have happened throughout history, the Black man has been the face of change. However, Black women have suffered the same injustices and inequities with the addition of sexism (Collins, 2000). As Black women were forced to leave their homeland, they were also raped and torn and separated from their children (Davis, 1981). Additionally, throughout slavery, they were required to nurse White babies and create a home for their owners and be a place of solace for their own families (Hallam, 2004). As freed Black women, the rights given to Black men often excluded Black women like the rights to vote and drive. Black women were also isolated from the feminist movement, as it focused more on White women's needs. The history of the suffragette movement is retold with a White feminist lens but Black women like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Ana Julia Cooper, and Sojourner Truth were also active in the movement (Collins, 2009). However, they were eventually excluded because the White women felt including Black women would be a detriment to the movement and overshadow their needs as White people (Tong, 2009). Additionally, the civil rights movement often focused on the

prominent male heroes such as Malcolm X and Rev. Martin Luther King, but less on heroines like Rosa Parks, Dorothy Height, and Fannie Lou Hammer and others who also played a prominent role in the movement (Essayworks, 2015). Black women are present in historical movements but their stories and experiences are often told singularly, either highlighting their womanhood or Blackness but rarely both (Collins, 2009).

The narrative of Black women is historically described as the shadow to the Black man. Black women's unique perspective that includes issues of racism and sexism creates a story of complexity that is often overlooked. Another overlooked area is the mis-education of Black students, specifically Black girls. The next section discusses in general the deficit culture promoted by the school-to-prison pipeline and situates issues of inequities faced by young Black girls.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Black children comprise 40% of students who attend an impoverished K-12 school system, many of which are located in the inner city (Jordan, 2014). Such schools have been historically underfunded due to the low property taxes that often support public schools. Additionally, inner city schools are heavily instructed by white middle class women as well as over-policed and under valued. Many Black children are labeled as being resistant to learning, thereby constructing the myth of lesser cognitive abilities than their white peers (Ladson-Billings, 2012). This mentality, shared by teachers, administrators, and peers, has reinforced the school-to-prison-pipeline culture. The school-to-prison pipeline is a systemic issue that over-polices, arrests, suspends, and expels Black children at higher rates and more often than their white counterparts (American Civil Liberties Union, 2008). The school-to-prison pipeline is typically manifested with Black girls through zero-tolerance policies. Zero-tolerance policies

administer harsh punishments, such as suspension or expulsion from schools for minor infractions that are subject to interpretation and often reveal the ways in which institutional racism works. The policies "emphasize discipline and lead many Black girls to become disengaged from the learning process and from school altogether" (Crenshaw, 2014a, p. 9). The overpolicing of Black students creates a pipeline that pushes students out of schools and into crime and eventual prison. This series of events is impactful to all Black students but has unique disadvantages for Black girls, as they face both racialized and gendered oppression.

Further, the lack of presence of Black administrators, teachers, and Black staff in leadership roles may also be a detriment to Black girls. A theory surrounding children's literature insists that students need to have books and materials that mirror—show people that look like them—or window—present them with an experience of someone different from them so they can understand a different reality in order for them to learn (Style, 1996). Black teachers are often employed in inner-city schools with scarce resources that limit the success of the students and the schools, while other schools hire white teachers in much higher numbers than Black teachers (Frankenburg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). Hiring discrepancies further a narrative of where white and Black teachers belong, similar to where white and Black students should belong. Further, Nadworny (2015) showed that if a school had Black men teachers, then it was more likely the administration would also have a Black senior level administrator. The visualization of Black staff, teachers, and administrators allows white students to see Black authority figures as normal and Black students to see a role model that looks like them. Additionally, showing Black women as leaders provides a supportive narrative and mirroring, allowing Black girls to visualize themselves in academia and higher education.

Presence of Black Women in Predominantly White Institutions as Students and Leaders

Black women have had a consistent presence within predominantly White institutions (PWIs); however, their presence has often been limited to positions that are middle management, custodial in nature, or motivated by gender (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Black women are less likely to be hired in academia and, as a result, there are fewer advocates for Black women students (Frankenburg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). Black woman students are often linked to organizations that highlight women or Black people and typically not an intersection of both (Crenshaw, 1989). Although Black women's students at universities are enrolling at higher rates than their white women counterparts, they do not have the same support as their white women counterparts because of the lack of Black women in positions of power both in academic and staff roles (Chambers & Sharpe, 2011). The lack of Black women in positions of power also means a lack of mentorship, service, and advocacy for Black woman students. June (2015) explained that the increased rate of Black student enrollment in higher education puts an added pressure on faculty of color, as Black students often seek out faculty of color for mentorship and advising. This use of cultural taxation (a term June stated was coined by Amado M. Padilla) leaves the faculty of color overworked. Due to the lack of faculty of color nationwide, many faculty and staff are taking on roles of multiple jobs in order to support the marginalized students who often seek their help. To increase the visibility of faculty and staff of color, and specifically Black women at PWIs, targeted programming and policies need to be implanted to support them as students and professionals.

The narrative of Black women in academia should be powerful and create an image of service, sisterhood, and change for future generations. However, the limited visibility and lack

of support in aiding Black women through the collegiate and professional process has been detrimental to the persistence of Black women in academia at all levels.

Social Justification

One of the unfortunate challenges in offering a social justification for this study is the rampant killing of Black people, including Black women by white police officers and white supremacists (Mapping Police Violence, 2015). The literature is ever expanding due to the continuous death and harassment of Black people, work of activism groups like Black Lives Matter, and work of activists who take critical action towards equity and social justice (Garza et al., n.d.b).

Over the past three years, there have been a multitude of social justice movements, spurred by Black men murders committed by white police officers and white supremacists (Garza et al., n.d.b). In the first eight months of 2015, police officers had killed 195 Black people, 100 being unarmed (Mapping Police Violence, 2015). The number of Black people being killed with little to no repercussions for their crimes has not been this prevalent since the murders of Emmitt Till in Money, Mississippi in 1955 and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama in1963 that killed four little Black girls (Biography.com Editors, 2015). Currently, activists in Black Lives Matter promote an ideology aimed to value Black lives the same as any other lives. Three Black women created Black Lives Matter in an effort to achieve the following goals:

> #BlackLivesMatter is working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. We affirm our contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression. We have put our sweat equity and love for Black people into creating a political project–taking the hash tag off of social media and into the streets. The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation. (Garza et al., n.d.a, para. 6)

Although mainstream media attempted to criminalize the victims of police murders, Black communities remained resilient and connected. The Black Lives Matter movement grew to encompass all Black lives, bringing attention to groups that are intersectionally marginalized and dehumanized in America like trans, the differently abled, and Black immigrants. Black women maintained a supportive role in the movement until more injustices were enacted toward Black women, forcing them to become more visible within the movement. Brown (2015) reported that Kam Brock, an affluent Black woman employed as a banker was stopped because she was driving an expensive car. As she was questioned about her vehicle and occupation, law enforcement unconvinced she was sane or telling the truth, she was taken to a psychotherapy ward for being delusional and insisting that she was employed and that President Obama followed her Twitter account. After spending eight days in the Harlem psychotherapy ward, she was finally released with no reasoning for being held but and a bill for $35,000 for services provided. She immediately filed a lawsuit and is in court battles (Brown, 2015). Unfortunately, Kam Brock has not been the only Black woman mistreated by the police and other law enforcement agencies that have been charged to protect and or do no harm. The death of Sandra Bland in July 2015, while in police custody, after her unlawful arrest and detainment in a county jail forced the recognition of Black women being profiled and harassed by police (Ford, 2015). Her death was reported as a suicide. Once media outlets, specifically "Black Twitter," learned of her "suicide," there was outrage over her mistreatment and unlawful arrest, and many demanded questions. The shift in the movement was a beginning to recognize the historical mistreatment of all Black people (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015).

Black women experience a unique intersection of racism and sexism, causing them to be discriminated in different ways than their Black men and white women counterparts. The road to

college for Black women is more difficult than their Black men counterparts as well. Guerra (2013) explained that Black girls are expelled at higher rates than Black boys with less protection. Statistically, Black girls are six times more likely to be expelled compared to their White counterparts (Guerra, 2013), perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline that is a concern for Black children. The Black Lives Matter movement strives to establish an equitable education, law enforcement, and judicial system that values Black lives. Kimberle Crenshaw (2014) also cites the presidential initiative "My Brother's Keeper" as a blatant disregard for the plight of young Black girls and women in America. My Brother's Keeper initiative basically focused on helping young men of color achieve their goals without any reference to women of color (The White House, 2015). Fortunately, soon after, the White House released an initiative highlighting the issues of inequities experienced by women and girls of color (Jarrett & Tchen, 2014). The initiative was supported by 12 universities that would create opportunities for research, policy changes, and empowerment of women and girls of color in the United States.

Unfortunately, educated Black people are not valued more than uneducated Black people in terms of police brutality based on how Kam Brock, a prominent banker, Sandra Bland, a University student affairs personnel, and many others have been treated. Black Lives Matter becomes important when Black women are jailed or when they are dying while in custody, demonstrating a problematic racial inequity, which is not limited to law enforcement officials but includes other government sanctioned organizations and other interconnected systems of power that create inequities in the lives of Black women. Therefore, it is critical to understand how Black women navigate their lives within the current landscape of violence against Black lives.

Additionally, the disrespect often shown toward Black women is also a social justification for this study. An example is the comparison of the first lady to a monkey (Byrnes,

10

2015), the delay in the appointment of Loretta Lynch (Jones, 2015) to be the first Black woman attorney general, and the exclusion of Black girls in the presidential initiative to support youth of color obtain education and assistance (Crenshaw, 2014b). Young Black girls should be able to imagine themselves as successful leaders without being denigrated for their blackness. Unfortunately, too often they are fed imagery of defeat and treated as though their lives do not matter or are deserving of hatred, bigotry, and dehumanization.

Few images of powerful, smart, successful, and educated Black women such as the First Lady Michelle Obama, media icon Oprah Winfrey, and the CEO of Sam's Club and Wal-Mart Stores, Rosalind Brewer exist. Even with those positive ideas of success, it is not a realistic aspiration for many Black women who do not see people that look like them in their classrooms. Instead, damaging stereotypical images are highlighted in a variety of forms like media, social media, and literature. The current stereotypes surrounding Black women include images of maids, prostitutes, young mothers, and overt sexualization (Blaque, 2009). Historically, mainstream discourses have created narratives of Black women in ways that either they are overly feminized as caretakers, made into servantile roles, or seen as angry minorities for asserting themselves, all of which are detrimental to Black women and their identity development (Harris-Perry, 2011). Therefore, this study is aimed to challenge those mainstream narratives and move forward other images of Black women that are rarely documented in social history.

Barriers to Black Women and Girls Leadership Development

The treatment of Black girls in schools is detrimental to their learning and development as students. Such treatment impacts Black girls' self-esteem and potential leadership development (Tonneson, 2013). A variety of issues surround Black girls and women's

leadership development, but the key foundational focus is on the intersection of oppressive power structures.

Power structures that are not conducive to learning include the judicial system, the school-to-prison pipeline, zero-tolerance policies in schools, teacher and administrator support, and socioeconomic support. The judicial system is connected indirectly or directly to all power structures, which maintain the over-policing of Black girls, who will eventually become Black women, and Black criminal women in jail (Crenshaw, 2014a). The Black girls who attend impoverished schools are often subject to metal detectors and the policing of their schools from elementary until their high school graduation (Crenshaw, 2014a). Additionally, the teachers and administrators use the police in schools as discipliners of students who are deemed to be disruptive, often eliminating other procedures to diffuse a situation. Black girls are frequently expelled if they report sexual victimization, thereby further victimizing them (Tonneson, 2013). The expulsion of Black girls leads them to fall behind in the classroom, eventually causing them to act out. This mistreatment causes Black girls to further retreat from education and believe that the school system is not supportive or conducive to their progression into adulthood. Due to the lack of positive Black women as mentors, teachers, and administrators, or advocates, many Black girls do not visualize a better life (Style, 1996). In addition, if Black women have not been educated properly in the K-12 school system, they either turn to crime or to having children, hoping it will improve their situation (Crenshaw, 2014a).

There is a lack of familial and community support because those who could help Black girls, as in other Black people in the community, are also subjected to similar structures of oppression and could potentially be involved in working multiple jobs to sustain their household (Crenshaw, 2014a). Black girls who make it to college are met with similar power structures

because the K-12 system is directly linked to the acceptance and retention of Black collegiate women (Jarrett & Tchen, 2014). Although in theory Black collegiate women should have equal access and treatment in various programs, public spaces, and organizations, they often experience marginalization and lack of inclusion, thereby feeling deeply isolated (Solarzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). These forms of isolation can be traced back to Black collegiate women experiencing racism, sexism, and other forms of micro- and macro-level oppression (Solarzano et al., 2000). However, those Black women who managed to attend college acquired the skills that allowed them to cope and discovered mentors to guide them while in college (Warren, 2009). However, research focusing on the ways in which Black women cope in PWIs and successfully complete their education is not as prevalent as studies done reflecting Black men's experiences in college (Crenshaw, 2014b). This could be due to the fact that there are not that many Black women leaders in college or that the focus on men reflects a sexist narrative. Whatever may be the reason for the lack of narratives around Black women leaders' collegiate experiences, this study focuses on contributing to a much-needed area in the literature by exploring leadership narratives of Black women students.

Researcher Positionality

Methodologically, this study was conducted through qualitative inquiry, using a narrative case study model. The purpose of selecting qualitative inquiry was to use an in-depth understanding of Black women's experiences in student leadership positions and to map them against the local and national dominant discourses. However, of critical importance in qualitative research is to discuss the researcher's positionality within this inquiry. As the researcher, I bring values, beliefs, assumptions, and history to the study. I cannot claim with any level of intellectual honesty that during the course of this study I will divorce myself from that

which I study. Therefore, the more accurate and transparent scholarly work requires that I discuss my positionality to situate my study for the readers. Specifically, within narrative inquiry there is an expectation that "narrative inquirers need to attend to three kinds of justification: the personal, the practical, and the social" (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 24). To that end, I offer my researcher positionality as this intersected justification.

Much of my success I attribute to my parents. They both opted to go to work rather than college, but I believe they always wanted my brothers and me to live a better life than they did. My father enlisted in the Air Force at 20, my oldest brother was born the next year, myself in the next three years, and my younger brother three years after me. We had the opportunity to live all over the world, traveling to three different continents by the age of 13; I considered myself worldly and I quickly learned how privileged I was as a Black girl in the United States.

In middle school, I was faced with discrimination from my Black and white peers. As a military brat, I was often the new person to the school, and when I arrived I wore name-brand clothes, something I could not control as a child. I remember a Black girl telling me I was "rich" because I had a Jansport Backpack and a Tommy Hilfiger jacket. I was teased because of my perceived status, and the girls wanted to fight with me for no reason. The Black students perceived me as over-privileged and conceited, while the white students perceived me as different, but still not good enough. I was more accepted by the other military students at my school because the white and Black students from the area had already established cliques. The town we lived in was predominantly white and clearly separate and unequal, demographically. The majority of Black people lived on one side of the railroad tracks in dilapidated housing. In addition, all of the historically Black churches as well as the alternative school were on the same side of the tracks where the dilapidated housing was located.

Upon entering high school, I set personal goals to excel academically and socially by pursuing leadership roles in student government. I participated in a military centered class that allowed students to learn about aspects of military life and engage in civic leadership. I also engaged in Junior ROTC (reserve officer training corps), choir, band, and track and field. I quickly became a leader in school and I slowly became accepted among my Black and white peers. Although I was able to make friends, I still had only a few strong relationships with people who were born and raised in that town and often associated with other military students.

When I began looking into colleges, I was interested in attending a historically Black college or university (HBCU). My parents asked where I would like to go if money was not an option and I remembered watching *A Different World*, a popular 1980s sitcom about a fictitious historically Black university. Although Hillman College did not exist, I wanted to attend Howard University, the birthplace of many Black Greek Letter organizations, which produced strong Black role models like Phylicia Rashad, Zora Neale Hurston, and Thurgood Marshall. I was also interested in Langston University, the only HBCU in Oklahoma, but my brother was a visibly popular student, having been involved in student government and holding the pageant title of Mr. Langston as well as being a regional student representative for his fraternity. I did not want to live in his shadow, so I opted for a Predominantly White institution that was more realistic and economically feasible.

Once I visited the campus, I saw enough Black students to make me comfortable and I met a Black girl during orientation that gave me even more hope. Similar to high school, I set goals for success. I wanted to be involved in student government, seeing the elections as more of a challenge. I also wanted to be a member of Greek life. I was intentional about my interests of being involved in a Historically Black sorority. I wanted to make sure that I had a Black support

system as I navigated through a predominantly White space. In addition, I wanted to be involved in as many Black organizations as possible, so I joined the Black Student Union, NAACP, Women of Many Ethnic Nationalities, and others. I gained social status as a student leader in the Black community by being involved as a Senator, which was essentially the student representative in the student government. As a vocal and visual member of the university student Senate, I gained a similar status in the mainstream community when it was time to run for the Student Body Vice President. I was able to win and quickly became one of two Black students involved in many activities like Homecoming, residence life, and new student orientation committee.

Once I transitioned out of my Vice Presidency, I was interested in running for Student Body President and was able to make it to the run-off, but when I asked for support from a prior candidate, I was told it was important our President was Greek, i.e., member of a sorority or a fraternity. After reminding him I was Greek, he simply told me I needed to be a "real" Greek, i.e., a Greek like him. What he meant was to be a part of a historically white Greek letter organization. He, like all of my opponents, was a white man in a historically white fraternity. I was disappointed but felt I needed to work harder to become the president. I was upset when I lost the race because I thought as if "they," the bigots and disrespectful people, had won. Throughout college, I was often seen as a "token" Black leader and felt I had to be an example of Black Student leadership and success and break down damaging stereotypes as well as be a mentor to underclassmen. In addition, I also felt as though I needed to represent my gender and racial identity as the only Black woman, even though I, alone, cannot speak for Black people, women, or Black women. This was not expected of any of my white counterparts.

As I became more visible as a student leader, racial microaggression towards Black peers and me seemed more prevalent. In a new student orientation training in my final year, I was the only Black student on the executive board committee, which comprised 10 students. The new student orientation is an annual program that welcomes incoming freshmen and transfer students to campus at the beginning of the academic year. We often had to seek ideas from the 50 student volunteers of whom only three to four volunteers were Black and the rest were white students. A particular microaggression has remained prevalent in my memory: when seeking some ideas for icebreakers, two White women students were hesitant to share a game they learned at camp, but felt it might be appropriate as long as I did not take offense. When asked what game it was, I found out the game consisted of making fun of Black students' hair. Feeling strongly about the insensitive nature of the game, I was clear about the inappropriateness of such a game. I felt as though I was put in a position to speak for the entire Black culture, to explain to a dominant group why their jokes might not come across funny to us. It was uncomfortable to experience that divide as well as position myself as the Black cultural representative. Reflecting on the situation, I realized the lack of regard for Black students and their culture that was normalized in my white peers' lives. While they hesitated at first, they also argued how such insensitivities could also be amusing. Perhaps it was amusing from their perspectives, but at the cost of mocking Blackness, something that would not have been amusing as an icebreaker for Black students.

Between my third and fourth years, I had begun to become more sensitive to my identity and my place in higher education in a PWI. I was slow to realize career opportunities within an institution, while managing leadership roles in various organizations, including my sorority. In my senior year, I was invited to attend a NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel

Administrators) regional conference. There, I was able to meet and speak with graduate students of color in higher education who inspired me to imagine my career goals in an expansive way. I even began to think that I might want to pursue leadership in higher education to the point of being a university president. When I returned to my campus, I chose to apply to graduate schools. I was accepted into a graduate school that was a PWI.

Even as an engaged student leader from my undergraduate experiences, I felt lost many times in graduate school to navigate basic issues such as graduate assistantships, coursework, and identifying support systems. As a result, I learned many things through several mistakes. For example, I learned that obtaining a graduate assistantship that would situate me in a multicultural environment would not only be a favorable environment for me to learn and grow, but would also provide me with access to other people of color. Similarly, I was naïve about coursework and followed guidance received through advising where I was told that because I was a person of color, I did not need to take diversity classes. Later, when I began to pursue a doctoral program, I took a course in diversity and realized how beneficial such a course was for me. First, just being a person of color did not automatically guarantee me the scholarly knowledge that exists within multicultural literature. Having studied the scholarly literature, I was able to articulate and situate my identity development within the scholarship, as well as learn about other cultures. Learning about other cultures allowed me to interrogate my assumptions and prejudices that I did not even know I had harbored until I took such a course.

Throughout my masters and doctoral programs, I have experienced an impostor syndrome, similar to other women of color. The less I see women of color in leadership positions, the more I question my position and aspiration to take on a leadership role in higher education. I work hard, perhaps even harder than expected, and I still struggle with

18

belongingness in an academic environment where I am often in rooms and meetings as the only woman of color. My academic journey has inspired me to create a space for narratives of other women of color in leadership positions in higher education and offer such narratives as counter to the dominant narratives where Blackness and the Black experience are presented with failure and deficit.

Given the researcher positionality discussion as well as the intersection of Black feminism and qualitative research, I am following disciplinary trends to speak from first-person perspectives throughout this document. In Black Feminist Thought, arguments are made that reveal the silencing of Black women's voices, and in qualitative research there is a call for situating the researcher within the study instead of posturing outside the study. Therefore, in accordance with Black Feminist Thought and self-authoring I chose to use Black as the preferred term within this study because it is how I identify personally. However, African-American and Afro-American because they are either direct quotes or the words of the participants. Thus, with these disciplinary guidelines, the reader will find several instances of first person use throughout this document.

Rationale for the Study

As mentioned in the overview of the issues, the important factors surrounding this study are the school-to-prison pipeline, the Black Lives Matter movement, institutionalized racism, and the lack of presence of Black women in PWIs. Together these factors support a deficit model that creates the narrative that Black people, specifically Black students are unable to achieve the same accomplishments of white students (Ladson-Billings, 2012). Black women collegiate students have also suffered from this narrative with the added oppression of sexism (Bell, 2015). Addressing the issues that face Black women as women are just as important as addressing the

issues of race. The necessity to highlight the narratives of Black women as students is valuable because of the complex issues facing Black women in higher education. Narratives allow the oppressed to share their experiences and lives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Therefore, including Black women's experiences in relation to the suffrage movement, civil rights movement, and today's Black Lives Matter movement is imperative. These historical social movements are important to understand contextually, and the current issues of Black women as student leaders present a complex narrative exploring varying intersecting identities (Collins, 2000).

On college campuses, the primary support systems for Black women are either other Black women, faculty of color, or Black organizations (Haywood, 2005). Organizations like the Black Student Union focus on the plight of Black students and Black people in general, rarely highlighting Black women's issues while women's groups and centers often focus on issues of overarching sexism and discrimination without including racial marginalization. The limited areas that allow Black women to express themselves openly are within small silos of only Black women. The emphasis in the literature is rarely on Black women as leaders specifically (Domingue, 2014; Warren, 2009). The lack of Black women leaders reflects the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline (Guerra, 2013) and institutional racism.

The hierarchical system present at PWIs also systemically excludes Black women from succeeding in their academic achievements, leading to very few Black women in leadership positions (Miles, 2012). The lack of visibility of Black women as mentors, successful professionals, and leaders could exaggerate the struggles of Black women collegiate students as they pursue leadership experiences. Therefore, narratives of Black women academic leaders or Black women collegiate leaders are minimal in the literature, which guides the rationale for conducting this study.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of three to four Black collegiate women leaders in higher education in their third and fourth years of study at a Predominantly White Midwestern institution.

Research Questions

1. How do the participants describe their experiences as both a Black person and a woman in their formal and informal educational contexts?

2. How do the participants discuss the ways in which they navigate(d) challenging situations in their experiences as Black women as undergraduate student leaders in a PWI?

3. What do the participants identify as support systems that help them navigate their challenges?

4. How do the participants describe developing their identities as student leaders as a result of their experiences?

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was used as the overarching method for this study because it allowed the researcher to use her theoretical worldviews to support her research. Qualitative research is conducted when a topic needs to be explored, forcing the researcher to become a part of the study (Kim, 2016). Qualitative research attempts to understand and explore a problem, often with the intent to "transform the world" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). The approach that best suits this research is narrative case study approach, explained in detail in Chapter 3.

The goal of narrative inquiry is to discover the ways in which participants understand their storied lives and re-tell their stories as they construct their understanding of their experiences (Kim, 2016). The origins of storytelling resonate with many Black people as a

cultural practice in oral tradition, making narrative inquiry an ideal approach for this topic (Atkinson, 1998). However, the study of negotiating leadership experiences amongst Black collegiate women provides the opportunity to understand the case or collective issues surrounding Black women student leaders. The data collection methods include life story interviews of the participants, participant writing, photo and object elicitations, researcher journal for documenting reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks for this study are explained in detail in Chapter 2. However, here, I briefly orient the reader to the three primary frameworks. The epistemological foundation for this study is Black Feminist Thought (BFT), first coined by Patricia Collins (1990). This epistemology focuses on the ways in which Black women know, live, and understand their lives that are contrary to the mainstream narratives of Black women. Within this framework lies the ways in which Black women could be empowered; engage in self-definition; and challenge the ways in which they are understood, treated, and oppressed within dominant discourses. Critical Race Theory (CRT) serves as a mid-level framework for this study. The framing offered by CRT allows for the exploration of how social structures of oppression play out in education, specifically connected to racialized oppression. The tenets of CRT are explored in detail in Chapter 2; however, CRT is useful in this study to examine the ways in which leadership experiences in higher education reflect institutional racism as it plays out in the lives of Black women student leaders. The opportunity to combine BFT and CRT provides possibilities for creating counternarratives that challenge the oppressive narratives constructed about Black women, and most often not by or with Black women.

The Leadership Identity Development Model (LIDM) serves as the micro-level theoretical framework for this study. In other words, LIDM is specifically used in the study to focus on how leadership identities are developed. However, this model does not specifically attend to the development of leadership within a racialized and gendered environment.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to have a practical, theoretical, and social contribution. The practical implications of this study include creating literature that will help practitioners support Black women students on predominantly White campuses. The information learned from this study will expand the understanding of leadership literature in relation to this uniquely diverse group as well as create counternarratives to the current deficit narrative surrounding Black women college students. Additionally, the research will provide opportunities for Black women options for self-identifications, and the research will support the ideology that Black women are active on predominantly White campuses and not anomalies in the realm of student involvement and leadership. The theoretical implications of this study consist of contribution to theories like Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Feminist Thought (BFT), and Leadership Identity Development Model (LIDM). The theoretical contributions will come from understanding how the participants negotiate their experiences and how such experiences can be theorized to add to the current literature, where Black women's experiences are not well explored, with the exception of BFT. Theoretically, this study can contribute to both CRT and LIDM by adding the intersectionality of Black women's experiences and enrich ideas presented by BFT, through self-authoring and self-valuation.

The final significant piece of this research reflects the social context within which the study is situated. As social justice issues surrounding the mistreatment of Black people; mis-

education of Black women and women all around the world; and the lack of support on predominantly White campuses for Black faculty, staff, and students persist, it is imperative that studies highlight the stories of Black women students. Through directed research, practice, and social movements, positive change can help advance the narrative of successful Black women student leaders at PWIs.

Limitations

As a novice researcher, I anticipated that I would have a learning curve around issues of conducting interviews to build rapport and trust and having the presence of mind to ask thoughtful, probing questions. However, I sharpened my interviewing skills prior to conducting research and also developed interview protocols that would address all areas of inquiry. Secondly, access to participants was limited based on availability of the participants. Thus, I maintained a flexible schedule to accommodate the participants' availability. Additionally, once I established trust and rapport, I was concerned that the topics of discussion might be difficult for some participants, as they might evoke painful memories. I was sensitive to those moments, stopping the interview if needed, as well as offering information about referral services, and accepted that I might not be able to work with the same participant if she declined to talk further. Although sensitive topics were discussed, all the participants remained a part of the study and there was no need to begin the participant search again. Finally, this is a qualitative study, and, as such, it is not meant to create findings that would be generalizable for an entire population. Therefore, I have to be mindful of representing the findings within their context and compare the findings to larger sociocultural patterns trends instead of making arguments of generalizability.

Definition of Terms

Black

I acknowledge that some members of the community of the African diaspora may prefer African-Canadian or African-American. Given the history of names imposed on these groups, i.e., "Negro" or "Colored," it is important that whether one identifies as Black, African-American/Canadian, or Other, one is able to name oneself and reclaim the power of voice and identity. The word is capitalized to emphasize its cultural and political connotations (Amoah, 2013).

Black Twitter

A collective of active, primarily African-American Twitter users who have created a virtual community that participates in continuous real-time conversations (Jones, 2013)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)

A university founded historically for the education of Black people in America (Samuels, 2010)

Institutional Racism

Describes societal patterns that have the net effect of imposing oppressive or otherwise negative conditions against identifiable groups on the basis of race or ethnicity (Head, 2015)

Leadership

Relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007, p. 74)

Lived Experiences

"A reflexive or self-given awareness that inheres in the temporality of consciousness of life as we live it" (Dilthey, 1985, p. 580)

Predominantly White Institution (PWI)

The term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which white people account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. However, the majority of these institutions may also be understood as historically White institutions in recognition of the binarism and exclusion supported by the United States prior to 1964 (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

Student Leaders

Any student who holds an elected or appointed leadership position within a university approved organization and identifies as a student leader.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the issues that make this study relevant and necessary. The interlocking systems of oppression, institutional racism, and lack of equity in education are all barriers to the leadership development of Black girls and women. To create counternarratives surrounding Black women as student leaders, a strong theoretical framework must support the practical and social implications of Black women and girls in leadership spaces. The multilevel theoretical frameworks that support the literature surrounding the development of Black student leaders in a collegiate setting are further explained in the following chapter.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter offers pertinent literature and foundational information for the study. As such, a claim can be made that identity development is always intersectional, since a person is not a monolithic being. Specifically, for the purpose of this study, this intersectional understanding of identity is forwarded to the ways in which historical, theoretical, and empirical discourses could potentially inform Black women student leaders. The chapter begins with an epistemic and theoretical orientation to Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, and Leadership Identity Development Theory study (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Theoretical Constructs

Black Feminist Thought
- Holistic / Epistemological

Critical Race Theory
- Methodological

Leadership Identity Development Model
- Contextual /Content

Meso

Micro

Figure 2.1. Interplay between various theoretical frameworks informing this study.
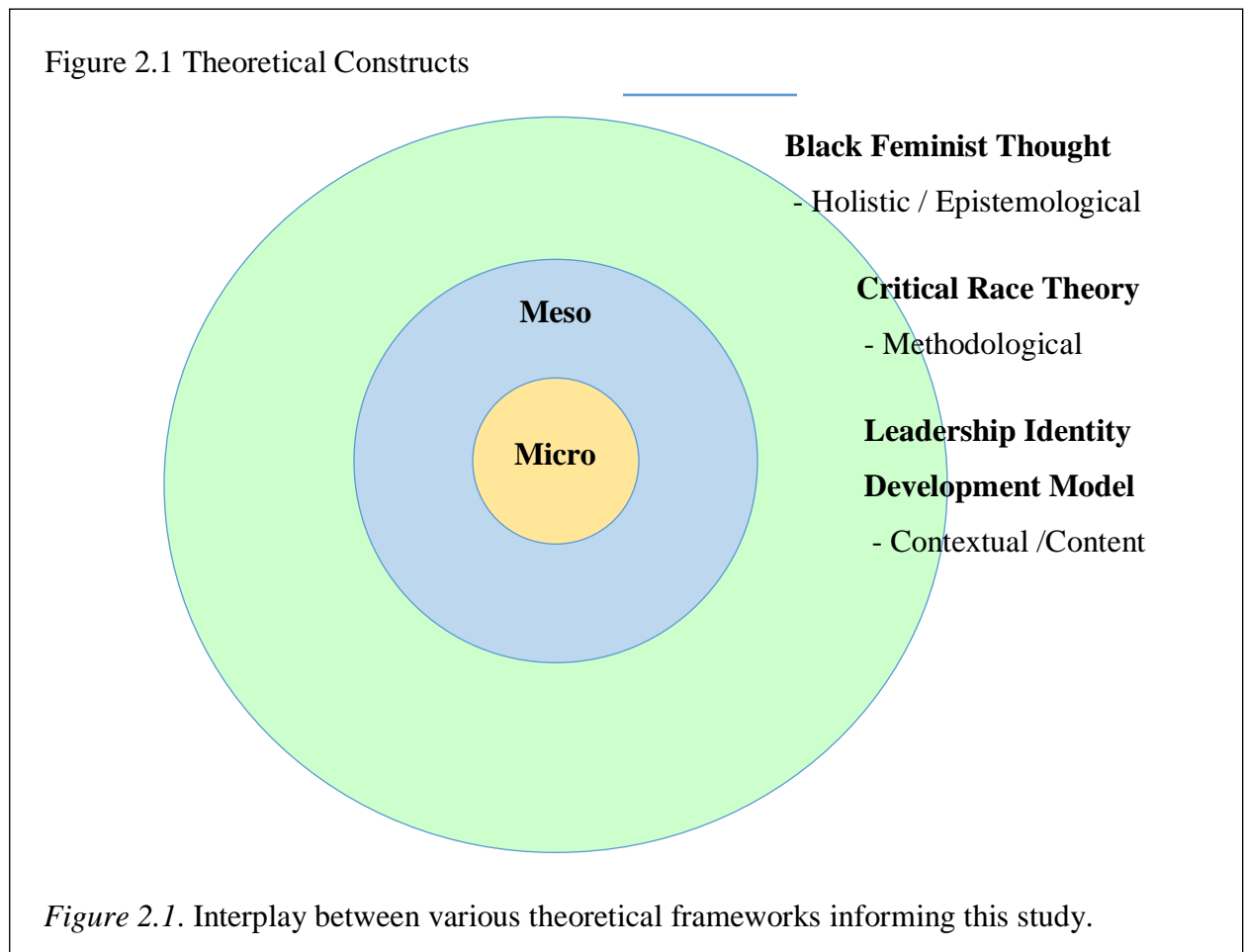
The constructs of the theoretical framework can be broken down into three levels: macro-meso-, and micro-level. The macro-level framework for this study is informed by Black Feminist Thought (BFT). In other words, BFT informs the study in a broad epistemological way, in terms of how knowledge is constructed. Critical Race Theory is situated at a meso-level, which is a mid-level theory because of the specificity of the focus of the theoretical tenets. Leadership Identity Model is a micro-level theory because of its substantive closeness to the research topic. In other words, progression from macro- to micro-level theories reflects the scope of the focus of the theory in this study. In the next sections, I explain the various theoretical frameworks that inform this study, the leadership literature specifically as it pertains to Black women and Black women students at college campuses, and barriers and challenges faced by these women.

Theoretical Framework

Black Feminist Thought: Epistemological Orientation

This study is grounded in Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as part of the ontological and epistemological orientation. In other words, the ways of my being and knowing are deeply influenced by BFT. The reason for stating a personalized theoretical orientation is in alignment with conducting qualitative research, tenets of BFT, and Critical Race Theory. It is critical to unpack the lenses through which this study was approached and maintain an argument that the researcher is not separate, ahistorical, or acultural within the context of the study.

Black Feminist Thought was initially birthed from a sociologically significant idea that Patricia Hill Collins developed. The three themes that support Black Feminist Thought are self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Afro-American women's culture (Collins, 1989). Self-definition involves challenging the political

knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood discussed later in this chapter. In contrast, self-valuation stresses the importance of Black women's self-definitions and authenticity, which would challenge the dominant, oppressive images of Black women offered in mainstream discourses. An example of self-valuation could be the resignation of Melissa Harris-Perry from her self-titled television show on MSNBC in March 2016. Her resignation decision came after a series of unanswered queries about the future of the show as well as the sudden lack of airing of the show for an indefinite period without communication. Harris-Perry was asked to be present at other news shows where her role was minimal to non-existent. Harris-Perry finally resigned, as she stated that she was unwilling to be used as the token Black host if her ideas are not in consideration and if her queries are not answered in some manner. In her resignation, she dismissed the stereotyped positionality of "mammy and little Black girl" to choose the authentic representation of self, although it was not financially favorable (Tribune News Services, 2016).

As a Black woman, I am a self-identified Critical Race scholar in training who strives to understand the importance of justice and equity within the education system and greater society. Additionally, I am a Black woman who self-identifies as a Black Feminist scholar in training because many of the general feminist issues do not discuss Black culture, histories, and ideals. I write these sentences in first person as part of enacting a Black feminist self-defining epistemology. Thus, from this epistemic place, it is necessary that I identify my worldviews while discussing Black Feminist Thought.

The second theme, interlocking nature of oppression, involves the historical abuse of Black women in the labor market (Collins, 1990). Black women were accustomed to working during slavery, so the opportunity of education was not a priority for Black women post-slavery.

Once Black women decided to attend school, the discrimination they experienced made persisting within education difficult (Virginia Historical Society, 2015). Some examples of discrimination would include segregation even when it was made illegal, lack of funding, resources, violence in school against Black people, and criminalizing Black behavior repeatedly to remove Black bodies from school (Heitzeg, 2009). Due to the discriminatory acts connected to educational access mentioned prior, Black women were limited within the labor market. The positions available to Black women with or without an education were overwhelmingly domestic positions, including but not limited to, nurse's aides, day-care workers, and fast food employees (Crenshaw, 1989). The aforementioned positions are then supported by the negative images of Black women depicted as mammies, matriarchs, and perhaps welfare recipients, which justifies the oppression within mainstream discourses. These images normalize racism, sexism, classism and other forms of oppression present in parts of everyday life (Collins, 2009). Therefore, the labor market is a contributor to the interlocking nature of oppression as the education and judicial systems are. The oppression within the labor market, education, and judicial systems depict Black women as loud, angry, and uneducated. This mindset within mainstream discourses ignites the mistreatment of Black women, while minimalizing what Patricia Hill Collins described Afro-American women's culture (Collins, 2009).

Afro-American women's culture explains the varied, complex, and multidimensional culture Black women have shaped and cultivated for themselves. The culture is used to dismantle the myths created by the interlocking levels of oppression by depicting Black women's culture as more than monolithic and stereotypical (Collins, 2009). This cultural framing provides a level of camaraderie among Black women, which supports self-definition and a shared knowledge within the culture (Collins, 2009) informed by Black Feminist Thought. Thus,

30

Black women intellectuals sharing narratives of their lives informed by Black Feminist Thought position themselves to provide counternarratives to existing dominant stereotypical notions of Black women. This becomes an invitation for cultural outsiders to engage in conversation with Black women to challenge their previously held understanding if informed by dominant discourses. However, the sharing of such narratives is not innocent and puts the burden of education and the responsibility to incite anti-oppression conversation on Black intellectuals. And in doing so, there are expectations about how these narratives can be shared with cultural outsiders so they are made palatable without causing too much discomfort to those who occupy a dominant group.

Collins (1989) concluded broadly from an empirical study that two levels of knowledge inform Black Feminist Thought (BFT). The first level addresses the everyday knowledge shared between Black women in general and the other is the more specialized knowledge created by scholars within the community for Black women. Collins (1989) explained, "Black Feminist Thought rearticulates a consciousness that already exists . . . Afro-American women another tool of resistance to all forms of their subordination" (p. 30). In other words, Black women have used various tools of resistance including, but not limited to, silence, defiance and retaliation (Sweet, 2016). The ideas shared within BFT literature open up ways in which Black women could view themselves as individuals within a collective. Being individuals within a collective allows Black women to honor their authentic, unique identities and engage in solidarity against common forms of oppression as part of their consciousness. Within the collective, Black women intellectuals are used to conducting research in an attempt to dismantle oppressive structures. Historically, Black women intellectuals have used their individualized knowledge for theoretical and material understanding of how oppression works in their lived experiences. However, combining

31

activism with social justice has allowed women without the privilege of an education to add value to the collective. An inclusive and collaborative mindset created more opportunities for traditional scholars to explore the value in everyday work in which Black women are often forced to participate due to social structures of oppression. Thus, in BFT, the line between intellectuals and those who are not are often blurred because that which oppresses Black intellectuals can also oppress those who are not intellectuals.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) offered some assumptions informed by Black Feminist Thought regarding Black women intellectuals:

1. Experiences as Afro-American women provide us with a unique angle of vision concerning Black womanhood unavailable to other groups, should we choose to embrace it.
2. Black women intellectuals both inside and outside the academy are less likely to walk away from Black women's struggle when the obstacles seem overwhelming or when the rewards for staying diminish.
3. Black women intellectuals from all walks of life must aggressively push the theme of self-definition because speaking for oneself and crafting one's own agenda are essential to empowerment.
4. Black women intellectuals are central in the production of Black Feminist Thought because we alone can foster the group autonomy that fosters effective coalitions with other groups. (pp. 39-40)

The first principle explains that Black women's outlooks on their own lives have value, with their unique characteristics, because they are generated from their own axes of sociocultural differences as Black women. However, these perspectives are not monolithic or could not be reduced to easily understandable and consumable commodities. Thus, it is imperative that more scholarly efforts are invested in creating spaces for Black Feminist thoughts and the ways in which Black women's lives are understood, authored, and narrated.

The second principle explains that Black women are deeply invested in Black women's issues regardless of the challenge being too great or costly. In other words, it seems that Black women would be willing to invest intellectual, emotional, and perhaps even spiritual labor to

support other Black women in academia, regardless of the return on such investment. Thus, it could be argued that Black women intellectuals bear a greater burden in seeing their Black women colleagues succeed in ways that perhaps their white counterparts do not invest their efforts.

The third principle encourages self-definition for Black women as part of an empowerment agenda and emphasizes its critical nature. Self-definition challenges established or expected paths or positions in which Black women are expected to situate themselves. Rather, self-definition opens up uncharted paths and positions, thereby cultivating conditions for change through the epistemic orientation of Black Feminist Thought.

The final principle explains that Black women intellectuals are essential to Black Feminist Thought because they can create connections to further the research and understanding of Black women both within and outside their cultural groups. The collaboration among Black women and other allies could be used to help expand Black Feminist ideals, but it can also be used to educate allies and supporters of the development of Black Feminist scholarship, activism, and progress.

Collins's (2009) four principles describe the importance of Black female intellectuals to move Black Feminist Thought forward with self-definition, scholarly research, and empowering efforts. Additionally, fostering relationships is especially important to Black Feminist Thought in order to share the issues of Black women with others, build support, and come together in solidarity to work to eradicate issues of injustice.

Additionally:

Black women's absence from organized feminist movements has mistakenly been attributed to a lack of feminist consciousness. In actuality, Black feminists have possessed an ideological commitment to addressing interlocking oppression yet have

been excluded from arenas that would have allowed them to do so. (Collins, 2015, p. 311)

The exclusion can be seen in the suffragist movement that focused on middle class White women or in certain dialogues about fair wages for women that often only include White women in the workforce (Tong, 2009). However, the major difference surrounding fair wages among men and women do not consider racial inequity or historical context. In other words, a wage disparity exists between Black men and White men; therefore, the wage difference between White men and Black women is even greater than that between White men and White women. Thus, suggesting White women who have historically not needed to work due to class and privilege in comparison to Black women, who have historically worked for minimum wages, if any, is problematic.

Further, some White feminists believe exploring intersecting identities like class or race diminishes the impact of feminism (Davis, 2008). It is an idea that is damaging to women of color, women in poverty, and women who identify as queer, trans, or lesbian because it does not consider how they are affected. Limiting the feminist movement to a singular identity encourages the oppression of women outside the White middle class.

Ideologies similar to those mentioned above that do not discuss the disparity among women of color and White men validate the need for exploration of race critically through literature. The inclusion of Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework to support this study is based on the need to discuss the narratives of Black women in collegiate settings. The collaboration of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought provide the necessary epistemological and theoretical ideals to be shared surrounding Black women student leaders on predominantly White campuses.

Critical Race Theory Overview

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the meso-level theory that informs the methodology of this study. CRT is a worldview created by law scholars who saw a need for race to be intentionally observed and researched via American laws (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The fathers of Critical Race Theory, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, began discussing the importance of critical race issues around the 1970s. With the help of other scholars, they were able to develop a theory that encompassed the ever-changing face of racism and discrimination in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Initially, CRT was primarily used to defend Black people within the judicial system by providing a voice through individual narratives and stories. CRT scholars Bell and Freeman argued storytelling would lead to empathy and humanity toward Black people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been the foundation for marginalized groups seeking justice through the shifting of pre-existing laws (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). A variety of historically and politically oppressed groups, including Black people, Latinos, Asian-Americans, indigenous people, and people of Middle Eastern heritages, have taken CRT and adapted it to meet their group's needs. Latino scholars (Latino-Crit) focus on issues surrounding language discrimination and immigration (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Asian-American scholars focus on language discrimination and immigration in addition to debunking the model minority myth that ignores discrimination towards Asian-Americans (Chang, 1993). Groups of Middle Eastern descent focus on the negative effects and discrimination post 9/11 (Tehranian, 2007). Lastly, Indigenous scholars' focal points include sovereignty and their people's rights (Writer, 2008). CRT is used among a multitude of groups because the tenets can be easily applied to those who have been historically or are currently oppressed.

The basic tenets of Critical Race Theory are the following:

1. Ordinariness: racism is ordinary and difficult to address because it is not acknowledged.
2. Interest Convergence: because racism advances the interests of White elites (materially) and working-class Caucasians (physically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it.
3. Social Construction: race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient.
4. Unique Voice of Color: coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with anti-essentialism, the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the White people are unlikely to know. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, pp. 7-10)

The first tenet of Critical Race Theory, ordinariness, explains that racism is ordinary and under-acknowledged because it is associated with normalcy. The lack of conversations surrounding race and race theory remain because many do not believe there is a race problem. In other words, if racism is ordinary or normal, then there is no need to change normativity.

The second tenet, interest-convergence, explains that racism supports the interests of white people; therefore, there is not a need to eradicate racism, unless interests of white people are being jeopardized. Interest convergence often refers to any policy or practice change that can both support white interests in conjunction with a racially marginalized group interest. An example of interest convergence is the *Brown* v. *Board of Education* ruling, which legalized access to education to students of color while the control of the curriculum, state funding, and property taxes remained in the interest of white people (Banks, 2009).

The third tenet of CRT, social construction of race, explains that race is not something that can be understood as a biological construct. Rather, race is socially constructed, leading to inequities for certain groups of people and justification of said inequities. This social construction can be manipulated in favor of white people but can also be eradicated by white people when it is convenient. In other words, the social construction of race could be used for

gentrification, incarceration of an unusually disproportionate number of Black folks, and repeated violence against unarmed Black folks by law enforcement officials by weaponizing the Black body as one of a large, intimidating animal and or demon. An example is the murder of Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson. As justification for the murder of the unarmed teen, the officer stated that Brown looked like a demon, rushed him, and described himself as a child in the hands of a professional wrestler, Hulk Hogan (Siddiqui, 2014). Additionally, color blindness discourses could also be used to minimize the difference in lived experiences of Black people, to imply all people are equal and race is only a socially constructed lens, and perhaps even illusory.

The fourth tenet of Critical Race Theory focuses on the ways in which we could approach understanding voices of women of color. However, such understanding comes with complicacies and tension. On one hand, there is some need to highlight certain shared oppressive agendas that play out uniquely in the lives of people of color when compared to their white counterparts. On the other hand, there is a need to not over simplify how oppression plays out in the lives of people of color since social structures of oppressions operate within an ever-morphing power network. The power networking is more blatant with the intersectional identity as a woman of color. Yet, people of color, especially intellectuals, are in the position to discuss their complex lived realities that could be helpful for white allies to engage with and understand. It should be noted that the argument forwarded here is to not imply that it is the responsibility of people of color to teach white people about their oppression. Instead, a desire to understand and learn about lived realities of oppression should come from allies in the dominant group, otherwise the labor of people of color would be tied up in the interest of the dominant group.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was created within a legal context but due to the intersecting power structures that oppress Black people, the ideals of CRT can be easily transferrable to education. A few examples include the over-policing of urban schools, the disproportionate materials provided to predominantly Black schools, and the lack of resources in the form of administration and counseling provided in urban school settings (Petteruti, 2011). The following section explains how CRT can be used to think about issues of injustice in education, especially as they relate to the lived experiences of Black students.

Critical Race Theory and Education

The impact Critical Race Theory (CRT) has on education is prevalent from kindergarten to post-secondary education (Banks, 2009). Literature and research connecting CRT to education has been explored by scholars within the academy as well as by legal scholars (Bell, 1990; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Lynn & Parker, 2006). One of the most notable scholars surrounding critical race studies in education, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998, 2012), has written explicitly about the implications of race in conjunction with school policy, affirmative action, hierarchy, and curriculum. Ladson-Billings (2012) stated, "the first roadblock I encountered was that almost all of the education research literature on African-American students was organized around failure" (p. 117). This prompted the next 20 years of Ladson-Billings' intellectual labor and scholarly activism focusing on the problems of deficit narrative and a need for more successful counternarratives (Goings, Smith, Harris, Wilson, & Lancaster, 2015). The Black deficit narrative focuses on depicting Black people as inferior, incompetent, and deviant in some form or another. For example, the deficit narrative in the language of schooling consistently highlights the majority of Black students in education as underperforming or lacking in education in comparison to their white peers (Ladson-Billings, 2012).

To understand the Black deficit narrative, examining the laws that have created inequity in education is necessary. A major legal contribution to education was the 1954 case, *Brown* v. *Board of Education of Topeka* (Banks, 2009). The *Brown* v. *Board of Education* ruling served to create an idea of equality for all students, ensuring desegregation across the states. Segregation was illegal but the funding was not evenly divided among communities. The disproportionate funding resulted in the loss of many teacher positions in the Black community. Although, desegregation was positive in terms of attempting to provide equitable education, it was not supported with cultural competency training for teachers, administrators, staff, or students to ensure a successful transition. Cultural competency training would have given teachers the tools necessary to help Black students succeed. Instead Black children were subject to administrators and teachers who misunderstood how Black students best learned. This lack of information and understanding perpetuated the idea that Black people are unequal and uneducated compared to white people (Banks, 2009). A version of this ideology persists today and is one of the reasons why Black children are often over-policed in schools and assumed to be performing at lower rates than their white counterparts, which disproportionately places Black students in special education programs (Goings et al., 2015). To situate current and historical context of race issues, a critical race theory-driven reading of education is helpful, as forwarded by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998).

Ladson-Billings (1998) used curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation to explain the relationship and history between education and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Within the discourse of CRT and education, issues surrounding curriculum, assessment, and school funding are most common (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Curriculum is arguably the most powerful tool used in education today, since a school curriculum depicts what a student

will learn. Historically, curriculum has been used to eliminate or minimize the histories of people of color, through master scripting. Swartz (1992) noted, "master scripting silences multiple voices and perspectives . . . legitimizing dominant, White, upper-class male voices and the "standard" knowledge" (p. 341). Master scripting situates whiteness as normal and other groups as abnormal or unnatural, which silences issues relevant to all groups that fall outside the perceived norm. The issue with master scripting is that the history shared is often from the vantage point of the master scripter, rich, white men. Therefore, when groups that have been historically marginalized share their narratives, they are often seen in opposition to the master scripting. In other words, master scripting eliminates opportunities for marginalized groups to share their narratives by presenting history through a singular, dominant perspective. The use of master scripting devalues, and in some cases eliminates, diverse histories and marginalizes oppressed groups through a "color-blind perspective."

A color-blind perspective suggests that all people are the same and therefore have the potential to live the same life with the same opportunities. This perspective avoids addressing direct issues of structural inequities that play out in the lives of people of color. Within education, a color blindness perspective is forwarded to imply all students have the same opportunity, and yet often opportunities are made more easily accessible for white students than for students of color. For example, advanced curriculum, such as gifted and talented programs, could be seen as opportunities. Access to these programs is through standardized testing (Quinton, 2014), mentality supporting the idea that "advanced curriculum is used to restrict students of color" (Harris, 1993, p. 19). Assessment has historically been used to aid in the argument of white superiority; however, a counterargument has recently been used to debunk that myth (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In other words, if students in poor school systems receive

poor curriculum and poor instruction, then they are disadvantaged and perform poorly on assessments. Scholars like James Banks and Geneva Gay have argued the problem with assessment in conjunction with a poor curriculum and poor instruction is that many students of color and poor students are disadvantaged prior to the assessment (Banks, 2009). This cycle perpetuates a Black deficit narrative surrounding Black students in K-12 education.

In conjunction with assessment, disproportionate school funding affects schools based on property taxes, leaving students in poor neighborhoods with poor schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ladson-Billings (1998) explained, "inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism" (p. 20). Examples of institutional racism can be seen through the lack of resources allotted to poor school districts, which then results in overworked teachers and over-policed students (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Structural racism is evident by the fact that school resources are tied to property taxes making it impossible for inner city children to be given the same educational opportunities as their suburban counterparts. The racism embedded within school funding is prevalent and has been explored and researched by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), among others attempting to bring awareness to this critical race issue.

In summary, critical race theory and education pair well to highlight the ways in which oppression works in the schooling of Black children and in creating a deficit narrative. Further, in discussion of Critical Race Theory in education, various interlocking systems of oppression can be highlighted such as class, gentrification, race, etc. While Black people suffer from these structures of oppression, Black women experience further suffering due to gender-based oppression that could prevent them from assuming leadership-oriented identities outside their homes. In the next section, I discuss the Leadership Identity Development Model and its relevance in this study.

Leadership Identity Development Model

Leadership Identity Development Model (LIDM) is used as the contextual and micro-level theory for this study. In this section, I offer the definition of LIDM, the stages of the LIDM, and its implementation within the study.

The Leadership Identity Development Model (LIDM) is informed by a grounded theory approach, created to understand the processes a person experiences in creating a leadership identity (Komives, Longerbeams, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). The model is broken up into six stages, each stage explaining how an individual understands their leadership development. The theory was developed with leadership development theory as its foundation. The leadership development theory forwarded the notion that leadership is something to be learned and developed until one is confident enough to lead in a larger capacity than in one's current condition. LIDM was the first theory to include student development theory to support leadership identity development. Student development theory, along with relational leadership theory, informed the stages of the current LIDM. The model is linear and stage-based, requiring students to move through one stage before embarking on the next stage. However, the stages are not only linear but cyclical as well. Therefore, the student could potentially cycle through a stage several times, each time gaining a deeper understanding of the stage. The stages of LIDM are the following: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis (Komives et al., 2006). All stages have a transition that is activated by the beginning of the next stage. The stages are briefly explained below.

Stage 1
Awareness: The student's current level of understanding about leadership generally.
Leadership Understanding: An association with government and other prominent figures as leaders.

Transition Point: A parent or role model views them as leaders.
Stage 2
Exploration/Engagement: The students desire to seek out new opportunities for involvement.
Leadership Understanding: Adults begin to affirm the student's leadership abilities.
Transition: The students view themselves as having leadership potential.
Stage 3
Leader Identified: The student is clearly identified as a leader in a role or position.
Leadership Understanding: The student learns how it feels to experience a structured leadership role.
Transition: The student realizes leadership is difficult and often requires a group effort.
Stage 4
Leadership Differentiated: The student begins to differentiate between leaders with titles and leaders who took action.
Leadership Understanding: The student realizes leadership comes in multiple forms and can be accompanied by a title or without a title.
Transition: The student begins committing to specific goals.
Stage 5
Generativity: The students now care about his/her commitments and the betterment of others.
Leadership Understanding: The student seeks to sustain their groups and serve others.
Transition: The students begin to internalize their own leadership identity.
Stage 6
Integration/Synthesis: The student is confident in their group as a leader.
Leadership Understanding: The student believes their leadership skills can be transferred to other groups or situations. (Komives et al., 2005, pp. 396-397)

The stages of leadership reveal a movement from understanding leadership to be something broad and elusive to being a set of skills and disposition that one can internalize to inspire others. Thus, someone journeying through these stages moves from seeing leaders as someone who are role models to seeing themselves as such.

The combination of Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, and the Leadership Identity Development Model provide the lenses to explore the lived experiences of the participants with varied levels of focus. Black Feminist Thought operates at an epistemological level demonstrating how knowledge might be constructed around Black women's understanding of their lives. Critical Race Theory assists with understanding how the social structure of oppression, especially in education, continues to inform the ways in which Black women's

schooling experiences inform their identities. Finally, the Leadership Identity Development

Model specifically focuses on how one could potentially see themselves as a leader within the

context of operating in socially unjust situations. An example of a socially unjust situation is the

school-to-prison pipeline that prevents Black people generally, and Black women specifically,

from educational advancement into leadership positions.

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School-to-Prison Pipeline

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Historically, Black students have been placed at a disadvantage educationally. As slaves,

Black people were not allowed to learn to read or write (Woodson, 1919). Once Black people

were freed from slavery, with state government assistance, Black communities opened schools to

educate Black children and others who wanted an education (Virginia Historical Society, 2015).

However, the school materials and amenities provided to Black schools were unequal to those of

white schools. The books were old and outdated and were not enough materials for all students,

and the classes were overcrowded (Banks, 2009). Due to the inequity, a lawsuit was filed in

Topeka, Kansas (United States Courts, 2016). *Brown* v. *Topeka* was an opportunity to create an

equal learning environment for all students. The case extended past the state of Kansas and

became a Supreme Court case, *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, "ruling that school segregation is

inherently unequal" in 1954 (Banks, 2009, p. 205). Once the law was passed to integrate

schools, causing white and Black students to attend schools together, some states remained

resistant and refused to integrate (Banks, 2009). Federal government was forced to intervene in

many states in the south like Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas because Black students were not

being protected and the law was not being upheld (The Aftermath, 2016). Although the schools

were required to integrate, the idea of white superiority persisted. Additionally, the lack of

cultural training or understanding coupled with the lack of Black faculty and staff working at the

schools, Black children were subject to discrimination in the classroom (The Aftermath, 2016).

Today, the remnants of this ideology can be seen in the hiring of faculty and staff, the inclusion

or exclusion of certain students into talented and gifted programs, and the increase of students of

color into special needs programs (Ladson-Billings, 2012).

Recently, the influx of institutional racism has caused the K-12 school system to be

plagued with the belief that Black students are less intelligent and more troublesome than their

peers (Ladson-Billings, 2012). Institutionalized racism is a system that perpetually oppresses

Black people and people of color through a variety of mechanisms (Head, 2015). In K-12

education, these mechanisms could include, but are not limited to, placing Black students as at-

risk students, special needs students, or students who are disciplined more frequently than others,

including sending them to alternative education (Kim, 2012). This type of disproportionate

action against Black students makes it appear as though Black students are underperforming,

when the conditions for their performances are not discussed. The school-to-prison pipeline

discussions highlight the expulsion, arrests, and removal of Black children from productive

learning environments, which eventually lead them to poverty and crime (Kim, 2012). The

school-to-prison pipeline can be easily understood as the mistreatment of students of color,

which disproportionately place them in categories associated with troubled youth. In other

words, institutionalized racism has created a school-to-prison pipeline, and yet there are

discourses that explore how to help Black people perform better without addressing the inherent

racism in the system directly.

This treatment of Black students results in negative outcomes that affect their educational

productivity (Amuaro, 2013). When Black students are forced out of school, they become

victims of their circumstances, with the opportunity to receive an education taken from them,

requiring them to seek other ways to make money (Crenshaw, 2014b). Further understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline explains, "those who are unnecessarily forced out of school become stigmatized and fall behind in their studies; many eventually decide to drop out of school altogether, and many others commit crimes in their communities" (Amuaro, 2013, p. 2). According to the School to Prison Pipeline Infographic (see Figure 2.2.), 70% of arrests made in schools are of Black and Latino children. However, Black and Latino people make up only 30% of the overall population and 68% of the prison population (Amuaro, 2013). This disproportionate number of arrests of Black and Latino people creates the narrative that they are inherently criminal and predisposed to commit crime. It is a damaging idea because it perpetuates a cycle of institutional racism and attempts to justify the inequity within the prison system. The facts surrounding the school-to-prison pipeline cast Black and Latino children as being the main characters of this narrative. The school-to-prison pipeline often highlights the injustices enacted toward Black boys and men, but Black girls and women are also affected by the pipeline.

Figure 2.2. School to Prison Pipeline Infographic

ARE OUR CHILDREN BEING PUSHED INTO PRISON?

THE PIPELINE TO PRISON: THE U.S. HAS THE HIGHEST INCARCERATION RATE IN THE WORLD, AND ITS PRISONS AND JAILS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY FILLED WITH AFRICAN AMERICANS AND LATINOS. THE PATHS TO PRISON FOR YOUNG AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND LATINO MEN ARE MANY, BUT THE STARTING POINTS ARE OFTEN THE SCHOOL AND FOSTER CARE SYSTEMS.

FROM SCHOOL TO PRISON
STUDENTS OF COLOR FACE HARSHER DISCIPLINE AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE PUSHED OUT OF SCHOOL THAN WHITES.

40% OF STUDENTS **EXPELLED** FROM U.S. SCHOOLS EACH YEAR ARE BLACK.

70% OF STUDENTS INVOLVED IN "IN-SCHOOL" **ARRESTS** OR REFERRED TO LAW ENFORCEMENT ARE BLACK OR LATINO.

3.5 X BLACK STUDENTS ARE THREE AND A HALF TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE **SUSPENDED** THAN WHITES.

2 X BLACK AND LATINO STUDENTS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO **NOT GRADUATE** HIGH SCHOOL AS WHITES.

68% OF ALL MALES IN STATE AND FEDERAL **PRISON** DO NOT HAVE A HIGH SCHOOL **DIPLOMA.**

FROM FOSTER CARE TO PRISON
YOUTH OF COLOR ARE MORE LIKELY THAN WHITES TO BE PLACED IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM, A BREEDING GROUND FOR THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

50% OF CHILDREN IN THE **FOSTER CARE SYSTEM** ARE BLACK OR LATINO.

30% OF FOSTER CARE YOUTH ENTERING THE **JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM** ARE PLACEMENT-RELATED BEHAVIORAL CASES (e.g., RUNNING AWAY FROM A GROUP HOME).

25% OF YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING FOSTER CARE WILL BE **INCARCERATED** WITHIN A FEW YEARS AFTER TURNING 18.

50% OF YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING FOSTER CARE WILL BE **UNEMPLOYED** WITHIN A FEW YEARS AFTER TURNING 18.

70% OF INMATES IN CALIFORNIA **STATE PRISON** ARE FORMER **FOSTER CARE** YOUTH.

THE COLOR OF MASS INCARCERATION

BLACK OR LATINO **61%** OF INCARCERATED POPULATION

VS

BLACK OR LATINO **30%** OF U.S. POPULATION

ONE OUT OF THREE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES WILL BE INCARCERATED IN HIS LIFETIME

ONE OUT OF SIX LATINO MALES WILL BE INCARCERATED IN HIS LIFETIME

© Community Coalition

Figure 2.2. School-to-Prison Pipeline Infographic from pbs.org illustrates the school to prison pipeline and the effect on Black and Latino people specifically.

Black girls and women are affected by the school-to-prison pipeline similarly when compared to Black boys. However, the intersection of race and gender often causes Black girls to be treated differently (Crenshaw, 1989). Black girls are affected by the racism that plagues

Black males while also combatting sexism. Black girls experience sexism in education through

the dismissal of their experiences of sexual abuse and harassment, which also contribute to their

entry into the prison system (Saar, Epstein, Rosenthal, & Vafa, 2015).

> Black girls also respond more directly and physically to being sexually harassed. Instead
> of acknowledging these responses as coping and defense mechanisms, school staff and
> administrators often misperceive Black girls and young women as aggressors and punish
> them inappropriately. (Tonnesen, 2013, p. 3)

In other words, Black girls are criminalized and their experiences are invalidated when

they are accused for their own victimizations. These insensitivities towards Black girls cause

them to be blamed for their unwanted harassment, suspension from school, or entry into the

juvenile system and, in some cases, all of the above (Tonnesen, 2013). The experience of

degradation toward the Black girl extends past the schools and into law enforcement.

Government entities continue to support systems of institutional racism that oppress and

marginalize Black women and girls (Charleswell, 2014). One of the major stakeholders that

perpetuate injustice is the police system. As the law enforcement agency in the United States,

the police system is connected to each power structure. In times of emergency in residences and

residential areas, school systems, judicial hearings, and psychiatric wards, police are required to

be present. However, it is not the only group that creates inequity, but the prison system and the

judicial systems are inherently biased and historically racist and corrupt (Lawrence, 2011).

Additionally, the judicial system presents barriers including financial, educational, and the lack

of proper legal representation that often send Black women to prison with a less than fair trial or

sentence from a judge (Lawrence, 2011).

Black girls are arrested and handcuffed as young as elementary school (Robertson, 2016),

perpetuating the idea that as innocent children, Black girls are predisposed to criminal behavior

warranting restraint. This criminalization contributes to the argument that Black children are

treated like adults by school administration, faculty, and staff (Scott, 2016). Black girls are

under-protected in educational settings, specifically in K-12 education. The video of excessive

force and abuse of a Black high school girl, while in class in South Carolina, by a school security

officer, Ben Fields, is a blatant example of the disregard for Black girls' bodies (McLaughlin &

Visser, 2015). This behavior of security guards in schools provides an opportunity for them to

assert their authority in intrusive and degrading ways. Similarly, the video exemplifies the idea

that schools are not only creating the pipeline that leads Black girls to prison, but it creates the

atmosphere that school is already quite similar to a prison due to overpolicing and excessive

force used on Black bodies. Black girls are six times more likely to be suspended from school

than their white counterparts (Crenshaw, 2014a). This mistreatment of Black girls causes them

to dropout more frequently than their white peers. Unfortunately, those who persist in K-12

education are not always able to pursue a college education because of their lack of self-efficacy

and foundational knowledge perpetuated by the lack of educational support by teachers and

administrators.

The treatment of Black girls in the K-12 school system creates the foundation for their

self-esteem in future endeavors. If a Black girl anticipates being attacked by school security and

not defended by school administration, then they could begin to resist other forms of authority,

just as a means of self-protection. Instilling a safe and supportive environment for Black girls in

school would provide confidence in the education system as well as allow Black girls to focus on

their education and their self-efficacy surrounding education. Many of these students are unable

to attain a high school diploma, which "places individuals on a pathway to low-wage work,

unemployment, and incarceration" (Crenshaw, 2014b, p. 8). Black girls are met with a variety of

barriers that include familial, community-based, educational, and others. Due to the factors that

emphasize their marginal status in society, those who are able to attain leadership skills have found or created ways to cope, effectively communicate, and persist in an oppressive racist educational system. Once Black women students arrive in college settings, specifically predominantly White settings, they are met with similar issues of racism, sexism, and conflict both on and off campus (Svokos, 2015).

Black Students at Predominantly White Institutions

Currently, Black students have the unique opportunity to attend any college or university they choose. However, this accessibility was not achieved without myriad challenges. Although Black people have attended predominantly White institutions (PWIs) since the civil war, widespread acceptance into PWIs did not happen until the 1954 *Brown* v. *Board of Education* ruling, making segregation illegal. Aside from the overall lack of support to integrate colleges and universities, Black students were often sanctioned to specific spaces within the university for housing, dining, and other school activities (Thelin, 2011). Today, Black students face challenges like microaggression and discrimination, which are addressed further in this section (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

When Black students attend PWIs, their racial identity is questioned or reshaped (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Therefore, "racial/ethnic minority students face a quandary in predominantly White classrooms as they struggle to prove themselves in the face of continual challenges about their academic potential" (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 165). In other words, Black students are often second-guessed for their abilities in a predominantly White educational setting because they are continually faced with racist ideals, language, and rhetoric, which make them feel as if they do not belong in a predominantly White space. Even academically high-achieving Black students feel as though they must combat racial stereotypes in relation to their academic success

(Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001). Unfortunately, "it is assumed that Black students continue to be admitted to college because of policy initiatives like affirmative action and diversity and not because they are actually qualified scholars" (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 160). The idea addressed above is damaging because it perpetuates a white superiority myth and dismisses the merit and intellectual capacity of Black students. The microaggressions that Black students experience often begin to mentally, emotionally, and physically wear on them, creating racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2011).

Racial battle fatigue is a concept that addresses the physical and mental wearing on persons of color through microaggressions, micro-attacks, micro-insults, and micro-invalidations. Microaggression was coined by Harvard psychology professor Chester Pierce (1970) explaining that although the racism experienced is not as overt, microaggressions are real and can be detrimental to productive working, living, and scholastic/academic environments (Smith, 2011). Examples of microaggression in the classroom could include a professor calling on a Black student to provide references about an inner-city neighborhood or students assuming a Black student is a student-athlete or that they were accepted into college because of Affirmative Action. Microaggressions are small but numerous in all spaces of education and beyond. Many people of color encounter them several times a day (Solorzano et al., 2000). The taxonomy for racial microaggression can be divided into the following categories: microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations (Minikel-Lacoque, 2013).

1. Microinsults are often unconscious and include behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity.

2. Mircoassaults are often conscious and explicit racial derogations characterized primarily by a violent verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions.

3. Microinvalidations are often unconscious and include verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color (Minikel-Lacoque, 2013).

An increase in microaggression could eventually lead to racial battle fatigue because the person being attacked may feel as though they are entering battle daily (Solorzano et al., 2001), which could cause a person to become defensive in the classroom or at work and essentially be on guard or be prepared to battle at all times. Black students have learned to cope with certain microaggressions and institutional racism that persist within Predominantly White institutions in order to be successful in attaining their degrees to create advancement opportunities. Many institutions have noticed the inequitable treatment and have created departments to support diversity on campus. However, the lack of cultural awareness on many campuses coupled with diversity initiatives have often not helped with microaggressions and, in some cases, have created a diversity dilemma.

The dilemma can be understood as the realization of institutionalized racism on campuses as well as the lack of support underrepresented students receive. In other words, while there is an understanding that Black students might be isolated in a predominantly White campus, resources for supporting Black students are also not equitably allocated due to their minority status (Garrett-Lewis, 2012). The diversity dilemma has caused institutions to create diversity positions, seek diverse faculty and staff, and create diverse spaces for students called counterspaces (Thelin, 2011). Counterspaces are physical locations within an existing

environment that are affirming as well as comfortable places for interactions that can be verbal or nonverbal, for historically marginalized or oppressed groups (Solorzano et al., 2000). A few examples of students creating counterspaces in response to the discrimination and racism on campus are: multicultural student centers, fraternity or sorority houses, and cultural centers.

Yet even with counterspaces, injustices are still prevalent and in recent years, Black students have organized and protested for their student rights. In 2015, three Black queer women students at the University of Missouri (Mizzou) created the Concerned1950 movement (Lu, 2015). They protested in an effort to have the university president dismissed among other demands, which would improve the status of Black and other oppressed groups on campus. The protests came after a series of racial injustices experienced by Black students on campus, including racial slurs and threats of violence directed towards Black students and the lack of responsiveness and concern from the administration, especially the university president. The protests persisted until the Black student athletes, specifically the football players, announced they would not play until the president resigned. Within one day, the president resigned. The protests were heavily publicized, but many other Black students continue to face issues of equity across various campuses (Wong & Greene, 2016). Depictions of Black students' struggles in the media can be seen in movies like *Dear White People* (Brown, 2014), which emphasizes the many injustices Black students experience on predominantly White campuses as well as the lack of administrative support when social inequities arise.

The campaigns for justice and equity at PWIs have spread across campuses in the past three to four years (Wong & Greene, 2016). Black student leaders have rallied, protested, and created partnerships with local police departments and law enforcement to create change (Whiting, 2010). However, Black identities on college campuses are continually described by

dominant stereotypical narratives, or minimalized, or questioned if they differ existing stereotypes. To change the narrative surrounding Black students at PWIs, counternarratives must be presented depicting Black students' struggles, accomplishments, issues of belongingness and need to be seen as equal to everyone else as legitimate and worthy of due attention.

Intersectionality and Identity

To focus on issues of injustice, one needs to understand the multipronged ways in which injustice functions, which can be further understood through discussions of intersectionality. Intersectionality highlights the importance of varying identities within feminist literature and theoretical frameworks, to include but not limited to, religion, gender, sexual identity, and racial or ethnic identities. Black Feminist Thought highlights the multitude of identities that Black women occupy generated from the subject positions of gender and race specifically, but also from occupational, familial, and intellectual subject positions. The connection between intersectionality and identity are necessary to further explain how multiple aspects of identities can both be acknowledged and embraced.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991). Intersectionality refers to the combination of race and gender that attempt to counter the historical and political ideals of Black women. The definition can be more precisely understood as, "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis, 2008, p. 68).

Initially, intersectionality was written to discuss the complexities of women of color, highlighting their experiences between feminist and anti-racist discourse. According to McCall

(2005), "intersectionality has since been heralded as the most-important contribution that women's studies has made so far" (p. 88). Intersectionality was seen as a large contributor to feminist discourse because it brought attention to women who were "multiply-burdened" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). In the past, feminist theories have fallen short of including experiences of women of color and their life stories in the overarching narrative pertaining to women's rights (Tong, 2009). The argument among theorists (Lutz, 2002) has been whether intersectionality will refute general feminist theories that focus primarily on gender by including racial and ethnic difference (Davis, 2000). The concern by "female essentialism (the view that all women are, down deep, exactly alike) and female chauvinism (the view that privileged women should take it upon themselves to speak on behalf of all women)" (Tong, 2009, p. 8) is that intersectionality would directly contradict the established feminist movement and potentially undo the work of previous feminist scholars and activists. The argument remains that "the success of intersectionality is, therefore, at least in part, attributable to the implicit reassurance it provides that the focus on difference will not make feminist theory obsolete or superfluous" (Davis, 2008, p. 72). In other words, intersectionality is inclusive and seeks to include identities that affect gender equity like class and race. In addition, theorists (Bowleg, 2008; Jones, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006) have debated whether intersectionality could be used for everyone or if it is only relevant to people who have been marginalized or occupy under-represented positions (Davis, 2008). While the concept of intersectionality could be considered a way to understand any person's identity development, Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality specifically focused on the struggles of women of color. Dill and Zambrana (2009) define intersectionality using four theoretical interventions. The authors noted the use of theoretical interventions is intentional because although intersectionality is not a theory itself; it is used as an analytic lens through

55

which theory is viewed. The following four tenets are considered interventions for challenging

dominant discourses about people of color:

1. Placing the lived experiences and struggles of people of color and other marginalized groups as a starting point for the development.
2. Exploring the complexities not only of individual identities but also group identity, recognizing that variations within groups are often ignored and essentialized.
3. Unveiling the ways interconnected domains of power organize and structure inequality and oppression.
4. Promoting social justice and social change by linking research and practice to create a holistic approach to the eradication of disparities and to changing social and higher education institutions. (p. 5)

The first intervention of intersectionality places the experiences of marginalized groups at

the beginning of an individual's development. This intervention places value on the lived

experiences of individuals' intersectional identities and seeks to understand identity development

process through a worldview specific to the individual.

The second intervention of intersectionality expands on the first intervention by

introducing the complexities within a group identity. This intervention explains that although a

group has an overarching culture, there are variations to their culture because of the varied

individual identities. For example, Black women and men exist within one Black group identity

but the individuality of Black men and women create a group variation. The understanding of

the second intervention is important because the complexities of a group culture are often

ignored (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). The lack of cultural understanding is detrimental

because it presents all individuals within a group as singular beings lacking complexity.

The third intervention focuses on intersecting power structures that oppress the

expression of people's identities, specifically those of Black women. It emphasizes the

importance of understanding how power structures are connected to create inequitable

circumstances for marginalized groups and how oppression is perpetuated through these systems.

Learning how multiple government entities are connected to enact oppression is important because it provides an opportunity for the use of intersectionality in an effort to eliminate social injustices by challenging social structures and networks of power.

The final intervention of intersectionality aims to use research and practice to eradicate the injustices that affect marginalized intersectional groups. The specific areas emphasized are higher education institutions and social institutions. Both areas are historically successful in creating social justice policies and practices (Thelin, 2011). In an effort to persist, scholars and scholar activists use their knowledge and influence to support marginalized intersectional groups (Howard- Hamilton & Hinton, 2011). Typically, scholar activists support groups with whom they identify, leading scholars like Kimberle Crenshaw to pursue research centered around Black women. For the purpose of this study, Black women student leaders are a unique group to focus on because they are affected by racism and sexism within a collegiate setting.

The intersection of leadership identity, racial identity, and gender identity among Black women student leaders creates a picture of a systemic struggle for a self-defined narrative. The systemic racism surrounding these varying identities highlights the fact that "intersectionality centers analysis on how students' experiences are enmeshed in systems of power and inequality" (Torres et al., 2009, p. 589). In other words, students will experience inequality and forms of oppression within the school system. The education system asserts power through zero-tolerance policies and inequality by expelling students of color at higher rates than white peers, among other ways (Crenshaw, 2014b).

The Black women participating in this study would demonstrate intersectionality of their various identities, which might reveal their negotiations with various social structures of oppression. Specifically, because the Black women in this study shared their narratives

surrounding their experiences in education, the exploration of power and inequity arose throughout the discussions. Interdisciplinary by design and in its application, intersectionality supports the argument for new approaches to understanding and researching the interplay of various aspects of identity within higher education.

Identity

To explore the intersection of race, gender and leadership, identity literature is relevant. Graafsma, Bosma, Grotevant, and De Levita (1994) stated, "identity and development are intrinsically related" (p. 162). In other words, understanding a person's development leads to the understanding of his or her identity and the development process. Identity is used in a multitude of disciplines such as psychology, human ecology, and social psychology.

Identity was first addressed by psychologists focusing on identity formation in adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1964). Erikson focused on three dimensions of identity formation: "the subjective/psychological dimension, or ego identity *qua* a sense of temporal-spatial continuity and its concomitants; the personal dimension, or a behavioral and character repertoire that differentiates individuals; and the social dimension, or recognized roles within a community" (Cote & Levine, 2002, p. 15). The dimensions build on each other where the first dimension emphasizes foundation and ego-driven sense of self, the second dimension emphasizes unique qualities within a person, and the third situates the individual socially. All of the dimensions equally contribute to the identity of a person. Erikson recognized the psychological as well as social and personal dimensions of identity, thereby planting the seeds for a comprehensive, multidimensional theory of identity formation (Cote & Levine, 2002). Although, Erikson provided the foundation for identity research within psychology, sociologists have since expanded on identity research.

Sociologists focus on the identities and roles of individuals in groups, and on interactions among groups, including studies of identity politics and social movements (Torres et. al, 2009). The work of sociologists is important here, because of the disciplinary field of sociology of education. In this field, sociologists study the broader culture of education and identity formation within such a culture. Sociologists emphasize the role of higher education institutions in creating contexts for the development of situated "felt" identities, which may endure to become more permanent felt identities. A "felt identity is one that encompasses personal traits (i.e., intelligence, race) and roles (i.e., college student, athlete)" (Torres et al., 2009, p. 579). Being a leader can also be a felt identity that colleges and universities help shape as a permanent identity. Studies support the notion that undergraduate students experience some sort of felt identity development as a result of their experiences in academia (Howard-Hamilton & Hinton, 2011). This study emphasizes the felt identities of the participants to include personal traits like race and gender as well as the role of the student leader. Higher education has been a historical change agent within varying social movements (Thelin, 2011). Therefore, understanding sociologists' approach to identity can be helpful in examining Black women student leaders at PWIs. Specifically, the focus is Black collegiate women's racial, gender, and leadership identities.

Black Women's Identities

Historically, Black women have had to be the caretaker for their families and have taken on identities now recognized by mainstream culture as the overarching matriarchal Black woman identity (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). The ways in which Black women identify are much more complex than the limited stereotypes with which they have been historically portrayed in various media outlets. Stereotypical examples include Black women often playing roles in movies and

TV shows as maids, being the matriarch of a large family, or taking on the role of a single parent. The stereotypes previously mentioned are damaging because they portray a singular idea of Black womanhood. The maid marginalizes the Black woman by maintaining a servantile status while the matriarch shows the Black woman as super woman who demonstrates a sense of unnatural, unrealistic mental and physical superhuman strength despite dealing with multiple forms of social structures of oppression. The matriarch is often caring for many family members and is described as being impervious. Therefore, an argument can be made that when the Black woman is seen in real life, her pain is not acknowledged because of the stereotype that pain is nonexistent for her and therefore unworthy of acknowledgment. Although Black women's mainstream identities and self-definition have been intimately connected, the power of self-definition within Black Feminist Thought epistemology empowers Black women to author themselves how they see fit (Collins, 2009). In other words, self-definition provides an outlet for Black women to identify outside the narrow, oppressive, and patriarchal identities shown through a mainstream lens. Thus, extending this idea of self-empowerment to this proposed study, participants should be able to self-define their identities and how they move about in their worlds as Black women.

Further, the literature surrounding Black women either contains work that describes Black womanhood as a collective construct or discusses the individual ways a Black woman would perceive her femininity and existence within a racially marginalized, patriarchal world (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007). Therefore, it seems that Black women had to exist at least within two socially constructed spaces, as a Black person and as a woman. These spaces could cause a Black woman to question her allegiance for one group over the other, sometimes causing conflict especially in areas that situate the groups as

competition. An example of that competition would be obtaining the right to vote, human rights movements like the civil rights movement, and equitable pay (Crenshaw, 1991). Dill (1983) pointed out:

> The choice between identifying as Black or a woman is a product of patriarchal strategy of divide and conquer and their continued importance of class, patriarchal, and racial divisions, perpetuate such choices both within our consciousness and within the concrete realities of our daily lives. (p. 136)

The appearance of choice limits Black women to choose between two primary identities as woman and as someone who is Black, as if these are the only aspects of their identities worth considering. Restrictive choice negates class, educational status, privilege, and other factors that contribute to Black women's identities, which are broad, diverse, interconnected and complex, just like any other human being's intersectional aspects of identity.

The use of Black women's consciousness highlights the effects of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Collins, 2000). Similar to Dubois' (1903), Double Consciousness, Black women's self-authoring about their identities call for a balance act between multiple contradictory aspects of their identities. Black feminist scholars continue to discuss this balancing act by demonstrating the ways in which networked systems of oppression perpetuate racism, sexism, and other forms of marginalization (Collins, 2009; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). To fight such networked social structures of oppression, there needs to also be a commonality established so certain types of oppression can be challenged and eventually eradicated. Therefore, there remains a tension between individualized self-defining identities and a collective agenda to fight oppression as experienced by Black women.

The identities of Black women have shifted drastically since the first Black woman, Mary Jane Pittman, graduated from Oberlin College in 1823 (Evans, 2007b). The identity of strength and power has remained prevalent but has also been used to denigrate Black women (Harris-

Perry, 2011). An example of this denigration is used to abuse Black women because their strength is perceived as impermeability. This mindset is linked to the mistreatment of Black women, causing mental, physical, and spiritual damage (Collins, 2009).

Historically, overarching Black women identities such as the mammy, sapphire, and Jezebel can be traced back to slavery (Blaque, 2009). The depiction of the mammy is often dark-skinned, overweight, asexual, and usually contradictory of white beauty standards. This depiction is detrimental because it directly conflicts with the white beauty ideals of pale skin, straight hair, and petite stature. The mentality also depicts Black women with curves, kinky-curly hair, and brown skin as less beautiful and unnatural. The sapphire is often a lighter-skinned woman who resembles a biracial woman, usually depicting white beauty standards. The sapphire is also depicted with a fierce sexual appetite specifically geared towards white men. In addition, the sapphire is typically depicted seeking the attention of white men as a sense of "power" or control over them. The sapphire is harmful to Black women's identities because it portrays Black women as animalistic and hypersexual, unable to control themselves and their "hunger" for the attention of white men. Lastly, the Jezebel is often a combination of the mammy and the sapphire in appearance. The goal of the Jezebel is to emasculate the Black man by exposing his weakness but not acknowledge her own misfortune. She is depicted visually as a darker-skinned woman not resembling any strong qualities of the other identities besides the skin tone (Blaque, 2009). This notion of Black woman is sexist and demonstrates how patriarchy plays out in Black women's lives. Black women have been combatting these damaging ideas, rooted in racism, sexism, and patriarchy created during slavery and perpetuated even to this day (Smith, 2011).

The images of the historical mammy, sapphire and Jezebel are still prevalent in mainstream culture but the infusion of Black women in other entertainment avenues such as television and movie director's chairs like Yvette Lee Bowser (*Living Single/A Different World*) and Ava Duvernay (*Selma*) has proven positive for Black women's identities. The producers have created unique and complex roles for Black women that endear them to mass audiences and provide an alternative depiction of Black women in the media aside from stereotypes. Black women in director and producer positions have the opportunity to hire diverse characters and create stories that depict Black women as complex, beautiful human beings as anyone else. The popular television shows such as *Scandal*, *Being Mary Jane,* and *Grey's Anatomy* are respectively created, directed, and produced by Black women like Shonda Rhimes, Mara Brock Akil, and Debbie Allen. They explore a counternarrative for Black women depicting them as multifaceted, strong, empowering individuals. To support the new images of Black women, scholars like Dr. Brittney Cooper, Dr. Tanisha Ford, Dr. Melissa Harris-Perry, and Dr. Treva Lindsey continue to publish and create literature that push against the damaging images associated with Black women while representing themselves as Black women intellectuals (Dionne, 2013). Black women intellectuals emphasize the importance of creating literature that reflects Black women's identities within and outside of an academic space (Collins, 2000). The combination of Black women as leaders in mainstream industries like television and movies and the expansion of research and literature surrounding Black women are geared to change the limited understanding of Black women's identities.

As mentioned previously, Black women's identities are complex, complicated, and unique, as anyone else's. Yet, they have been depicted in unidimensional, monolithic ways in various discursive spaces within and outside academia. Monolithic identity depictions created

trappings for Black women historically where they felt like they had to choose between their needs as a woman or as a Black person, which minimalized their humanity. However, as explained earlier, there are several instances of Black empowerment and Black leadership that challenge dominant mainstream depiction of Black people generally, and Black women specifically lead by Black intellectuals, entertainers, writers, producers, and directors.

Black Collegiate Women in Leadership

The collegiate system is designed to create a village within itself, a culture that provides opportunities for students' mental, physical, and educational well-being and success. Black women collegiate students are often faced with barriers to their mental, physical, and educational success due to racism and sexism prevalent on college campuses (Solorzano et al., 2000). The barriers are included but not limited to: the lack of Black women as faculty and staff and lack of policy, programming, and literature for and about Black women. In an effort to overcome the aforementioned barriers, Black women have created student organizations and partnerships with faculty and staff and developed coping mechanisms. Although many Black women persist within PWIs, many are not able to overcome the barriers due to lack of self-efficacy and the perpetuation of the Black deficit narrative (Ladson-Billings, 2012).

One of the barriers to the success of Black women leaders at PWIs is the lack of Black women faculty and staff (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). The lack of Black women faculty is an indicator of a lack of relational support at the institutional level for Black collegiate women. Black women are left to seek out other like-minded, relational individuals in hopes of being understood (Chambers et al., 2011). Additionally, the number of Black women administrators and faculty among all U.S. campuses is extremely low in comparison to their white counterparts (Evans, 2007a). In spite of the lack of support, Black women who were able

to progress acquired coping mechanisms, gained leadership skills, and found mentors (Warren, 2009). Although, the narrative of Black women leaders exists, the policy and literature to support this narrative is minimal.

Another barrier to the persistence of Black women as student leaders is a lack of policy, programming, and literature (Harris-Perry, 2011). As mentioned in the "School-to-Prison Pipeline" section of the literature review, Black girls are expelled disproportionately to their classmates, and policies like zero tolerance harshly punish Black girls (Crenshaw, 2014a). The unequal treatment of Black women when compared with others persists within PWIs as well (Chambers et al., 2011). Increasing policy initiatives like the White House's report on women and girls of color (Jarrett & Tchen, 2014) has the potential to increase the awareness surrounding inequitable policies for women and girls. The White House report is a collaborative effort between 24 universities to highlight inequities faced by girls and women of color. For example, the authors noted:

> Girls of color still lag behind in their performance on standardized tests, and they are more likely to be suspended from school. Women and girls of color still face higher rates of poverty and receive lower wages for their work than their white peers, and they are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system. Women of color still have some of the highest rates of heart disease, obesity, diabetes and other serious conditions, and they experience high rates of domestic violence. And when women are the primary or sole breadwinners for nearly half of all households of color, these disparities do not just affect them, but their families and communities as well. (Jarrett & Tchen, 2014, p. 3)

Implications from the report extend to the ways in which higher education is responding to these disparities. College campuses are in the unique position to not only create infrastructure to support women of color, but to document their results and influence policies that can expand the support system for women of color. For example, Jarrett and Tchen (2014) noted that a university like Georgetown was in a position to gather "thought leaders, policy makers, practitioners, researchers, advocates, and marginalized girls and young women to focus on

increasing access to STEM and CTE opportunities" (p. 11) to address "barriers to access, including cultural competency, race and gender stereotypes, discrimination, and lack of sufficient resources to support programs in schools and communities" (p. 11). However, Georgetown is not unique and all higher education institutions could focus on the ways in which their institutional inequities impact their students of color generally, and specifically those who are vulnerable to multiple forms of oppression like women of color. Therefore, programs that support Black women are critical in higher education.

The creation of programming for Black women demonstrates the value of the Black woman on predominantly White campuses (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001). However, policy and programming can be heavily influenced by literature as well as the genesis for literature created. In other words, the successful implementation of policy for Black women can serve as an opportunity for best practices to be shared with other universities in the form of white papers, journals, and research studies. Literature surrounding Black collegiate women also normalizes the idea of Black women collegiate leaders.

However, there is research that indicates the need to further investigate the impact of policy, practice, and mentorship of Black women student leaders. Lamara Warren (2009) focused on Black women student leaders' experiences and specifically focused on how mentorship allowed the participants to succeed. She concluded in her work that further research is needed on this topic to contribute to the literature. Andrea Dominigue (2014) conducted a similar study to this proposed study where she explored the leadership experiences of Black women undergraduate and graduate students at a PWI and how they described their challenges and their identification of sources that nurtured and supported them. Her participants reported a hostile campus climate while they entered leadership roles to build and find community. They

66

also experienced other forms of oppression such as microaggression, racialized and gendered discrimination, along with various forms of silencing of their voices. The participants were supported by other Black women through models of mothering and mentoring, where they found the nurture they needed. Dominigue (2014) also reported that the participants were able to identify some White allies who were supporters. Both of these studies reflect a critical need to conduct several such inquiries to highlight the various ways in which these inequities play out, as finding empirical studies specifically in this area has been challenging, considering the lack of Black women student leaders on campus.

Pulling it All Together

This study is informed by Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as its epistemological framework. The framework allows for self-definition, self-valuation, and self-determination of Black women. The framework also represents a way in which knowledge about Black women could be constructed that is empowerment focused to counter predominant discursive narratives. Additionally, this study is also informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Leadership Identity Development Model (LIDM). CRT offers an understanding of how structural oppression across race plays into various social systems, including education, and LIDM offers a developmental approach to understanding students' identities. However, LIDM does not offer any racialized or gendered implications of identity development, and thus the combination of LIDM, CRT, and BFT is necessary in addition to understanding intersectionality.

The context of this study lies in the prevalent culture of building deficit narratives around Black lives, their existence, performances in schools, and over-criminalization of Black bodies. To that end, I discuss how the school-to-prison pipeline affects Black students and how Black women are doubly oppressed as racialized and gendered beings.

Given that this study is deeply grounded in identity development, I have provided long discussions about intersectionality, identity, and Black women's identities. These discussions show how various social structures of oppression continue to inform the identity of Black women and how they try to challenge such dominant narratives. Finally, I have provided a discussion on Black Collegiate Women in Leadership. The empirical studies provided in this section are few; however, it is an indication of the lack of research in this area, as well as the lack of presence of Black women student leaders in PWIs. Thus, these discussions warrant the study proposed in this document, as literature around this specific intersection of issues is sparse.

Chapter Summary

This chapter includes the importance of using epistemological theory, Black Feminist Thought, as well as racially driven theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory. However, these two theories are not substantial enough without a conceptual theory, Leadership Identity Development Model. Historically, Black girls have been harshly punished in school settings, which has created a variety of barriers to them developing leadership identities. Those barriers include the school-to-prison pipeline, lack of support in education, and the lack of Black women's presence in schools. Additionally, the combination of government-supported power structures have reinforced the ideology that Black women and girls must look to society to determine their worth, both academically and socially. However, understanding intersectionality and identity supports the idea that Black women must use self-authorship to cope and persist through their developmental process. These forms of self-empowerment, especially when supported by safe spaces and cultural acceptance allow the creation of counternarratives that challenge dominant stereotypical descriptions of Black women. As Black collegiate women develop as leaders, a sense of self-authorship allows them to redefine their identities as Black

women, breaking away from mainstream discourses. In the next chapter, I discuss the research

methodology that informed this study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Recall the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of three to four Black collegiate women leaders in higher education in their third and fourth years of study in a Predominantly White Midwestern institution. Recall the following guiding questions for this study:

1. How do the participants describe their experiences as both a Black person and a woman in their formal and informal educational contexts?

2. How do the participants discuss the ways in which they navigate(d) challenging situations in their experiences as Black women as undergraduate student leaders in a PWI?

3. What do the participants identify as support systems that help them navigate their challenges?

4. How do the participants describe developing their identities as student leaders as a result of their experiences?

In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology that informed this inquiry. Research methodology includes the ways in which I conducted the study, collected, analyzed, and represented data, as well as issues about academic rigor and trustworthiness.

Qualitative Inquiry

This study was grounded in qualitative inquiry because of the need to construct counternarratives that emerge out of in-depth understanding of the participants' storied lives. While qualitative research can be conducted from various philosophies of inquiry, one of the key tenets of qualitative work lies in understanding lived experiences as they occur naturally. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained the naturalistic characteristic of qualitative research:

> At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in natural settings, attempting

70

to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

For the purpose of this study, qualitative research allowed an inquiry into the experiences of the participants that occurred naturally in their lived realities instead of examining reactions emerging out of treatment, manipulation of conditions, etc. that are usually present in positivistic and post-positivistic inquiry. This kind of inquiry allowed an exploration of a person's own meaning making as the person interacts with other people, situations, and their histories. For two of the key proponents of qualitative research, the purpose of this kind of inquiry is to arguably "advance a social agenda" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 2). The value of qualitative research for this study is the in-depth exploration of the ways in which Black women collegiate leaders navigate their challenges and emerge successfully. To do justice to the purpose of collecting in-depth narratives, it was important that the scope of the research was driven by my time and resources. To that end, the sample size was four women, which aligns with disciplinary arguments about conducting in-depth inquiry using case study methodology (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative study can be conducted through several approaches. For the purpose of this inquiry, the type of qualitative study chosen was a narrative case study. In other words, I chose to use case study methodology informed by the specific framework of narrative inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry research is growing in popularity among educators (Kim, 2016). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) coined the term *narrative inquiry* and were the first to develop and create the foundation for narrative inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) further explained, "narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon" (p. 375). In other words, narrative inquiry makes spaces for the intricacies of a phenomenon experienced by a particular group of people. Connelly and Clandinin's work should not be viewed in isolation,

as if their ideas were completely unique and disconnected from other discourses. Connelly and Clandinin's work was influenced by other scholars such as Dewey, Polkinhorne, and others (Clandinin et al., 2007). These influences included philosophies of education, narrative unity, understanding of narratology, narrative analysis, and literary approaches to narrative inquiry.

As narrative inquiry developed, further concepts of participant support, analysis, and literary ideas validated the use of narrative inquiry as a methodology (Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry has been understood as a "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Clandinin and Connelly (2006) wrote about three commonplaces of narrative inquiry that focus on the following dimensions: temporality, sociality, and place. Together, the three dimensions provide a timeline for the participants' lives, which explains the individual life story and provides space to situate the life story. The commonplace of narrative inquiry is a framework, marking the guiding posts of where inquiry should be conducted to create storied lives of the participants. These spaces of inquiry need to be explored simultaneously to demonstrate how the narrative is situated in these interconnected common places.

The first commonplace put forward by Connelly and Clandinin is temporality. Temporality can be defined as, "events under study in a temporal transition" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). The use of temporality requires the researcher to understand the past, present, and the future of the participant. Storytelling, then, is how people make sense of the events in their past and present to understand their hopes and desires for the future. Temporality is always in transition, as no moment of time is fixed. Each moment of time is in transition to the next moment, and, therefore, stories are also always forming and reforming.

The second commonplace, sociality, can be explained based on concerns of the narrative inquirers, since "Narrative inquirers are concerned with personal conditions and, at the same time, with social conditions. By personal conditions we mean the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Thus personal and social conditions of the inquirer and the participant intersect in the second commonplace of sociality. In other words, the participant and the researcher bring their own personal histories, aspirations, and disposition to the space of inquiry. Additionally, both the researcher and the participant are also situated within the social context of their lives. Therefore, this commonplace demonstrates the interconnected relationship between the researcher and the participant, since Connelly and Clandinin (2006) specifically noted, "We cannot subtract ourselves from relationship" (p. 480) with the participants.

Place is the third commonplace of narrative inquiry. Place is defined as "the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of place where the inquiry and events take place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Here, place can be considered as physical but perhaps expanded beyond physicality to psychological spaces, spaces of memories, etc. Place is crucial to constructing narratives because certain details in a space directly interact with how storied lives are constructed in that space. When considering temporality and place together, there could be a presence of multiple places based on how the participant narrates experiences. According to Marmon Silko (1996), our identities are inextricably linked with our experiences in a particular place or in places and with the stories we tell of those experiences. In this study, I learned the participants' places included specific spaces in a PWI, along with counterspaces and places that rest in their memories and emotions such as experiences connected to readings of civil rights, womanhood, and injustices against Black people in the past three

years. The combination of these commonplaces and narratives that are situated in these commonplaces created fertile conditions for identity development for the participants in this study.

Telling one's story is specifically a recollection effort where the storyteller relives certain narratives from their current day sensibilities to reflect on their past experiences. These stories can also create a sense of identity and reinforce the identity as participants revisit these stories. In this way, one can say that storytelling is a process through which a narrative identity can be developed. Narrative identity is a way to understand identity and its complexity. Widdershoven (1994) stated, "personal identity can be compared to the unity of a story . . . stories show various kinds of narrative unity; consequently, one may distinguish various types of narrative identity, depending on the specific kind of unity they show" (p.111). Similarly, McAdams (2001) claimed that people could form a sense of identity by integrating their storied lives into a sense of self, which could happen through storytelling. The process of storytelling itself can become a sense-making process that connects people to multiple parts of their lives. Because storytelling is a reconstructive process of revisiting memories, by participating in telling a story and reflecting on the ways in which one is telling the story, one could gain insights into self and the development of various parts of one's identity. By creating these spaces of storytelling, Black women student leaders have been given spaces to legitimize untold stories. These were untold stories because these participants had not told them to an academic audience. The most they might have shared would have been with some cultural insiders and allies, but they usually remained in the shadows. Thus, a narrative case study approach allows for deep storytelling and understanding how the participants negotiate their experiences from their sociocultural locations.

Considerations for Case Study

Case study is a notable methodology that has been taken up by various disciplines including law, psychology, education, and medicine. Case study research is a common methodology used among qualitative researchers (Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994). Case study research emphasizes a particular case (Creswell, 2007), the scope of which is clearly articulated in terms of the parameter of the inquiry. In this study, the parameter of the case is the context of being Black women student leaders within a Predominantly White institution. Within this context, I investigated four Black women student leaders' experiences. Therefore, the case itself is the ways in which the four Black women student leaders negotiated their lives in a PWI. The specific units of analysis are the four participants speaking to the overall case of negotiation of experiences in a PWI. I provide the list below to support the use of case study. According to Yin (2003), case study methodology should be used in specific situations and for specific reasons.

1. The focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions.

2. You cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study.

3. You want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study.

4. The boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.

As the steps by Yin (2003) listed above suggest, case study emphasizes the importance of context while answering the "why and how" of the phenomenon. Incorporating case study could help discover how the students became leaders and the experiences that aided in their leadership identity development. Case study is expected to have "thick description, experiential understanding, and multiple realities. Pursuit of complex meanings cannot be just designed in or

caught retrospectively" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 236). Therefore, case study research is aimed at gaining deep understanding that unfolds naturally from the data, to understand the complex and the interconnected details of the case. The complexity and interconnectedness would be something that exists naturally within the bounded system of the case within qualitative research instead of something that is artificially inserted, much like how a variable could be used and manipulated in a quantitative study. Additionally, even after binding the case, it is important to note what the case will not be. In this study, the case was bound by the negotiation process of the participants. These Black women student leaders had been in the university since 2013; thus, I did not look at a historical depiction of Black women student leaders. Rather, I focused on student leaders who would be currently attending a PWI during the course of the study.

Case study research is best conducted using various research questions, artifacts, and other qualitative measures that provide multiple meanings and understandings to strengthen the case. Additionally, a qualitative case study "requires experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in its contexts and in its particular situation" (Stake, 2006, p. 2). Using a variety of data collection methods also supports the need to use two methodologies for research.

Although the merging of case study and narrative inquiry was necessary for this study, they do vary in implementation. Narrative inquiry offers the framework for the case study, whereas case study offers methodological guidelines. Narrative case studies are particularly important because of the approach taken by the researcher, who can marry case study approaches with narrative inquiry with the understanding that every person has a way to story their life events. In other words, "qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding" (Stake, 1994, p. 39). For the purpose of this study, the pairing of case study with narrative inquiry opened up the ways in which the participants' lives

are storied by themselves first, and then co-constructed by the researcher and the participant, which lead to some form of narrative identity development.

Narrative inquiry and case study seek to examine the holistic case. While holistic is perhaps too large a concept to capture in one study, certainly the aim was to understand the experiences of the participants' lives with as much coherence and depth as possible. Case study ensures the foci of the case but also recognizes "the case researcher considers many features of the case" (Stake, 2006, p. 3). Therefore, the researcher understood the case is complex and not singularly understood and was not under any illusion that she would capture all there is to capture or represent some kind of wholeness to the case beyond which no inquiry was needed. The combination of narrative inquiry and case study provided an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, which highlighted authentic identity development that allow Black women to succeed in a historically unjust system, something that is featured in Critical Race Theory.

The tenets of Critical Race Theory that most influenced this study were ordinariness and unique voice of color. Ordinariness explains that due to the difficulty in addressing race, it is not acknowledged and becomes ordinary because it is normalized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Ordinariness was used in the methods to understand the case of the negotiations of experiences of Black women collegiate leaders while defining their existence on predominantly White campuses. Additionally, the author used the "unique voice of color" to explain this phenomenon through narrative inquiry (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). The "unique voice of color" creates a space for people of color to share stories and experiences about their oppression and inequity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

As I collected data and worked with the participants of the study, I attempted to understand how Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) were unfolding within my research. As a researcher, I wanted to ensure the participants were comfortable within the interviews, so I explained specific terms and concepts that were pertinent to CRT and BFT. As I analyzed the data, I used the tenets associated with CRT and BFT to code and categorize the data in order to fuse the theory with data collection, analysis, and representation. My positionality as a CRT scholar in training and a Black Feminist informed the ways in which I made meaning of the data.

Defining race and the racial issues surrounding Black women student leaders in general brought attention to the necessity of discussing race and racial issues in higher education. Critical Race Theory influenced this topic by emphasizing the institutional racism present in higher education. However, the combination of Black Feminist Thought allowed the researcher to address the intersection of race and gender in relation to Black women student leaders methodologically.

The theoretical influence of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought are important because it emphasized the barriers prevalent in hindering Black women student leaders success. To bring both theories into the study and explain the participants' narratives, I chose to structure the study in the format of a Bildungsroman or a "coming of age story" (Dunlop, 2002) to reflect their authentic identity development. The incorporation of the Bildungsroman is explained later in this chapter.

Research Design

The research design process describes how I collected, analyzed, and organized the data. Research design begins with the selection of the participants and the location of the study. The

data collection methods that were used in the study were interviews, participant writings, photo elicitations, and collection of artifacts. In this next section, I discuss various aspects of research design that informed this study.

Participant Selection

I used a form of sampling, called purposeful sampling, which aimed to "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Figure 3.1 demonstrates the process of participant selection. I emailed the advisor of the Black Voices United[1] at the Dunder Mifflin University [2] (DMU), requesting a nomination of potential participants (see Appendix A). The criteria for participant selection were communicated with the advisor of the Black Voices United[1]. The criteria were women student leaders who were in the third or fourth year of their undergraduate studies who identified as Black and a leader. I received a response within an appropriate amount of time and proceeded to contact all the recommended student nominations. I emailed the nominees, offering information about the study, and asked them if they would be interested in learning more about the study and about participating in the study.

I received six affirmative responses, and I was able to schedule meetings with three students to discuss the study. I originally only wanted to use three participants, but after speaking with all four, I felt each of the participants brought a unique perspective and had compelling stories to share. At the meeting, I explained the study further, including my motivation to conduct the study and informed them of the time commitment involved.

Allowing students who self-identify as a Black woman and a student leader provided the

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[1] Pseudonym for largest predominantly Black organization at the PWI this studied was situated.
[2] Pseudonym for predominantly White university in the Midwest. Dunder Mifflin was the name of the fictional paper company in the television show, *The Office* where the cast was mostly White with only two people of color. Of the two people of color, there was only one woman of color, who did not occupy any leadership position.

opportunity for self-authorship among the participants. This was important because it demonstrated the participants' sense of identity and aligned well with the tenets of Black Feminist Thought. The requirement of an undergraduate full-time student helped narrow the group of students eligible to participate.

Finally, I invited each potential participant to ask questions that they had about the expectations of the study, their role as participants, or anything else that could arise. Once each participant felt all questions were answered satisfactorily, I invited them to sign an informed consent form, and provided them a copy with both of our signatures. I selected four Black women students, meeting the aforementioned criteria. Given that I conducted an in-depth case study, I built rapport and relationships with the participants over three months. During this time I engaged the participants in multiple forms of data collection to gather in-depth information across various data sources. Therefore, in order to do justice to participants' narratives and resources available to me to remain realistic in my efforts to demonstrate an in-depth understanding, I chose to select participants who reflected what I could achieve credibly during this study. The data collection process lasted 4 months and then extended further when I interacted with the participants for verifying my interpretation of their experiences and construction of their narratives, a process otherwise known as member checks.

Figure 3.1. Participant Selection for Narrative Case Study

An iterative process

Solicitation
Email Faculty Advisor of Black Voices United for participant nominations.

Contact Made
Emailed 10 potential participants with information and initial conversation!

Meeting
6 participants responded. Three met for informed consent meeting.

Selection
After informed consent selected 3 participants.

Extra! Extra!
Faculty advisor offered one late recommendation, who was selected.

Figure 3.1. Purposeful and criterion-based sampling procedures for participant selection

Data Collection Methods

To organize the process of data collection, I leaned on the seven-step process of data collection that set up the rest of the study. The steps are: locating the site/individual, gaining

access and making rapport, purposefully sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data (Creswell, 2007). Locating the site/individual consisted of finding students who fulfilled the criteria for the study. Gaining access should accompany the first step, but making rapport was built throughout the study with the participants. The data collection methods included interviews, participant writings, photo elicitations, and collection of artifacts. The interviews specifically emphasized Atkinsons's (1998) life story interview method and visual based-narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). To alleviate fieldwork issues, I worked closely with my advisor on the interview questions for my participants as well as answered them myself to ensure understanding and clarity of the questions, as I am a cultural insider to the participants with similar experiences. I also had the participants write about their experiences as Black women student leaders as they pertained to their development. I used questions to prompt them to begin writing in order to provide them with structure. Additionally, I conducted photo elicitation interviews with the participants where they brought in photos based on prompts I provided them. I stored and backed-up all electronic data collected, stored hard copies of data in a locked safe, and protected them via password on my computer when storing digitally.

I began locating the individuals, gaining access, and purposefully sampling during the summer of 2016. This three-part process took me less than one month because I received fast responses. The data collection began after I submitted and received an approved response from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once the IRB was received, in late to mid-August, I started the data collection process. The data collection timeline can be found in Appendix C. Table 3.1 represents the raw data pages that were generated from data collection efforts.

Table 3.1: Data Inventory and Potential Raw Data Pages

Source of Data	Number of Pages	Total Number of Pages
Life story interviews (3 interviews per participant)	9 interviews x 10 pages per interview	90
Photo elicited interviews (1 interview per participant)	4 interviews x 5 pages per interview	20
Artifact elicited interviews (1 interview per participant)	4 interviews x 5 pages per interview	20
Participants' Reflective Writing from 3 prompts	3 prompts x 1 page per 3 prompts x 4 participants	12
Researcher Journal	10 pages per month x 4 months[3]	40
Peer debriefing	3 interviews x 5 pages per interview	15s
Total Raw Data Pages		250

Life Story Interviews

Atkinson (1998) defined the life story interviews as providing a practical and holistic methodological approach for the sensitive collection of personal narratives that reveal how a specific human life is constructed and reconstructed in representing that life as a story. Furthermore, the life story is described as a "qualitative, ethnographic, and field research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life experience" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 225). I used life story interviews to understand the ways in which the

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[3] 8 months include time invested in data collection and data analysis.

participants constructed various narratives of their experiences. Life story interviews are also well aligned with storytelling as a practice that has been part of various Black cultures across the world.

Black people have had a rich history of oral storytelling passed down through generations. Life stories have been a form of explaining familial heritage and pride for hundreds of years. This method is similar to oral history and allowed the participants to use the three commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place to situate themselves and their experiences. The term *leadership*, by its very nature, is laden with meaning often derived from the interpreter's varied life history (Komives & Dugan, 2011). Therefore, the experiences of each student depict their leadership identity and shape their leadership style within their sociocultural location. Moreover, since storytelling is a part of cultural heritage of Black people, I anticipated the participants would be able to relate to this form of data collection well, and my anticipation was correct.

Indeed some researchers recommend two, three, or more interviews with the same participant, convinced that this multiple and staged approach can uncover greater detail, depth, and complexity of meaning of the interviewee's experiences (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). Using multiple interviews provides a plethora of benefits as well as creates a solid connection between the participant and interviewer. Earthy and Cronin (2008) created a list of advantages to multiple interviews.

1. It may assist the development of trust and rapport between the researcher and interviewee.
2. It may be less exhausting for both parties, particularly in comparison with a single attempt to capture a person's life story.
3. For interviewees who are unwell or who find aspects of the conversation distressing, the possibility of ending the interview knowing that the conversation can continue on another day may be particularly helpful.

4. The period between interviews provides an opportunity for both the interviewee and the researcher to reflect.
5. Aspects discussed in one interview can be clarified and explored in greater depth in a subsequent conversation. (Earthy & Cronin, 2008, p. 31)

The life story interview can often be shared rhizomatically, as in the story might not start chronologically or have a defined center. A rhizome is a usually a structure of an underground stem of a plant that shoots out roots and shoots from various nodes, leading to a non-centric growth or growth with multiple centers. Thus, a rhizomatic storytelling includes ways in which the participants will shoot out their recollection of events in non-linear formation that might have multiple central points without any one specific center. Additionally, "life story interview represents a bridge from seeing an individual life in its parts to seeing it as a whole" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 238). In other words, multiple interviews provide opportunities for the participants to build figurative bridges within their life story narrative even if it is non-linear, multi-centered, and multidirectional.

Life story interviews served as the primary source of data because they allowed me to explore the lived experiences of the participants. Guiding questions for the life story interviews are listed below. Please note that there were additional questions that arose as the interviews were conducted. Also, asking one question caused the participant to answer multiple other questions, which typically generated probes for further inquiry.

1. Tell me about what stands out to you in terms of your elementary school experience.

2. Tell me about what stands out to you in terms of your middle school experience.

3. Tell me about your first role model who inspired leadership in you.

4. Tell me about your first experience of being a leader.

5. What was your home life like growing up?

6. Tell me about the first time you recall wanting to go to college.

7. Tell me about your experience in the first year of college transitioning from high school.

8. Tell me about a time or an incident that made you realize that you are Black?

9. Tell me about a time or an incident that made you realize that you are a woman?

10. Tell me about a time or an incident that made you realize that you are Black woman?

11. Tell me about your experiences with your White peers in class and out of class.

12. Tell me about your experiences with your peers who are not White in class and out of class.

13. Tell me about your journey of being involved in college leadership experiences.

14. Tell me about your experiences if you had any of being a leader during your K-12 years.

15. Tell me about a time when you struggled as a Black woman leader and how you worked through it.

16. Tell me about a time when you felt supported as a Black woman leader in as much details as you can provide.

17. Is there anything you want to tell me that I did not ask?

Participant-Centered Data Collection Methods (Journaling, Photo and Artifact Elicitations)

The data collection methods listed in this section were predominantly driven by the participants with little prompts from the researcher. This is in contrast to interviews where participants respond to questions designed by me, the researcher. Here, the participants engaged in exploring their own thoughts with a few guiding prompts from me and then shared how they explored their understanding of their experiences as a result of engaging in certain exercises.

Journaling. The first of these exercises was journaling. I asked the participants to engage in some reflective journaling three times during the study. The times coincided with the

beginning, middle, and the end of the study. Beyond being exploratory, journaling allowed the

participants to share more than they might have during the interviews. Many authors describe

writing as performing (Atkinson, 1998; Peterson & Langellier, 2006; Richardson, 1994). Sarris

(1993) noted that stories are often not shared in "chronological sequence" (p. 1) and hooks

(1997) explained that people's lived and told stories are not linear and they do not necessarily

"move from point A to point B" (p. xx). During the interviews, I learned about multiple stories

that were organized in the participants' minds in some form that would be hard to recognize on

my own from the interviews. However, writing allowed the participants to address their stories

in ways they organize and make sense of when they are not expected to perform on the spot like

they were during the interviews. Since writing is a process of inquiry and analysis (Richardson,

1994), the ways in which the participant responded to writing prompts became informative in

terms of how the participants were making meaning of their narratives and justified what Barthes

said, "we give birth to ourselves in our writing" (as cited in Davies et al., 2004, p. 35).

Additionally, marrying Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) with the

participants' writing also provided an opportunity for the researcher to use their writings and

associate their thoughts with language used in CRT and BFT literature where self-expression and

self-valuation are honored. I married the theories in the writing by looking for language that

represented the tenets of both CRT and BFT. See the excerpt from a participant's journal entry

that displays the combination of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought.

Figure 3.2. Yara's Excerpt from her journal

After reflecting on interviews conducted, I would say I understand myself as a black woman leader, as someone who has a lot more potential than I allow myself to think. I feel as though I have a lot more to offer myself and those around me that I have shied from doing. I shy in certain situation because there seems sometime to always be as stronger presence. So I do not always step up. I am not talking myself down, because I know when I do lead then I excel. After the interview I understood myself as a key individual on this campus and well as felt that their are many others.

Figure 3.2. Yara's explanation about her own identity development as a leader based on her journal reflections.

The participants' writings also helped me learn about different microaggressions and inequities they experienced that did not come up in the interviews. The prompts provided were informed by the macro level Black Feminist Thought as well as information shared in the literature review. The following are some of the prompts used for the participant journal writing.

1. Write about how you understand yourself as a Black woman leader now based on the first interview we conducted.

2. What do you think you would say to your 13-year-old self based on what you know about being a Black woman and a student leader in a PWI college?

3. If you were to write out gratitude letters to people who have supported you to come to this point, who would you write the letters to and what would you say to them? Think of the barriers you have experienced as a Black woman student leader and think of the ways in which you overcame challenges.

Photo and artifact elicitations. Photo and artifact elicitation are forms of participant-driven data collection methods whereby the participants select photos (take pictures) or objects that are in some way meaningful to them and share their narratives surrounding those photos and

objects. These forms of data collection are important because they allow the researcher insight into the participants' experiences that may or may not be revealed from researcher-directed interviews. Kim (2016) offered a list of reasons for why one should use images in their research using an adapted version of Weber's work:

1. Images can be used to capture the ineffable, the hard to put into words.
2. Images can make us pay attention to things in new ways.
3. Images are likely to be memorable.
4. Images can be used to communicate more holistically, incorporating multiple layers, and evoking stories or questions.
5. Images can enhance empathic understanding and generalizability.
6. Through metaphor and symbol, artistic images can carry theory elegantly and eloquently.
7. Images encourage embodied knowledge.
8. Images can be more accessible than most forms of academic discourse.
9. Images can facilitate reflexivity in research design.
10. Images provoke action for social justice. (p. 150)

Thus, given the various ways in which images are already useful in inquiry, combining images with narratives would provide rich sources of information that would otherwise not be possible to obtain from interviews. The artifact elicitation also followed the same logic of using images because conversations triggered by objects and images could be deep and generative. For the elicitation interviews with images, I asked the participants to do the following:

1. Take pictures or bring pictures that you already have that demonstrate your understanding of what it means to be a Black woman student leader at a PWI.

2. Take pictures of a typical day for you that you think depict your experiences as a Black woman student leader on campus.

For elicitation interviews with objects, I asked the participants to do the following:

1. Bring objects, documents, or whatever else you already have that demonstrate your understanding of what it means to be a Black woman student leader at a PWI.

2. Collect objects (can be anything such as leaves, flowers, rocks, brochures, etc.) for one

day that you think depict your experiences as a Black woman student leader on campus.

These data collection methods had the potential to offer insights into the participants'

experiences that might support already existing understanding of Black bodies in White spaces,

but might extend the understanding in new ways that were previously unknown or undiscovered.

Figure 3.3. DMU Campus Visit in the Library

Figure 3.3. This picture was taken by Janelle, depicting her daily life as a Black student at a Predominantly White Institution.

Researcher Journaling and Peer Debriefing

Beyond collecting data driven by the participants, I expected to maintain some vigilance

on how I understood and processed the data collected and analyzed. To that end, I journaled

during the study to document my thoughts, hunches, assumptions, emptions, and subjectivities. I

expected I would connect these ideas to concepts I read and documented in the literature review

section. I also expected the journaling process would allow me to expand the ways in which I

conceptualized my understanding of the data and push me to challenge myself to expand and

interrogate my worldviews to see what else is going on with my data. To help the challenging

and interrogating process, I sought the help of a peer debriefer who would be familiar with

qualitative methods and the topic. This peer debriefer saw the data I collected, how I had

organized my ideas around data collection and analysis, and the meanings I made. I told my peer debriefer to identify any parts of the study that seemed incoherent, lacked logical flow, or demonstrated perspectives that needed further interrogation. I considered the information gathered via journaling and peer debriefing to also count as data sources.

<center>**Data Management and Analysis**</center>

Similar to the data collection process, the data analysis process is extensive. The process included data management, reading/memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting, theorizing, and representing/visualizing information. I managed the data by maintaining a digital folder with each data collected. I did not receive any hard copies of documents; therefore, I saved all emails and photos to my computer in a folder for all data analysis. I organized the large volume of data by organizing it in chronological order by participant pseudonym.

Data analysis was an iterative and emergent process and, thus, extremely difficult to predict how I would engage in it prior to collecting the data. Therefore, what follows below is at best an estimation of what I thought I might do to approach data analysis. Figure 3.4 is the non-linear, iterative, data analysis process; it is a depiction of the steps I took to complete analysis of my data while using the notion of Bildung.

I first read the data and conducted preliminary coding while reading the data from multiple sources. The forms of coding were descriptive, in-vivo, and narrative, in that order. Coding is the process of chunking data into semantic units to be available for closer analysis and meaning making (Saldaña, 2013). According to Saldaña (2013), descriptive coding involves selecting parts of texts and labeling those texts using some kind of descriptive detail that reflects the interpretive understanding of the researcher. In-vivo coding reflects the pulling out the words and passages from the text, verbatim, without placing any descriptive labels on them.

Narrative coding involves labeling relevant parts of the text using some form of a narrative

structure, such as parts of a story.

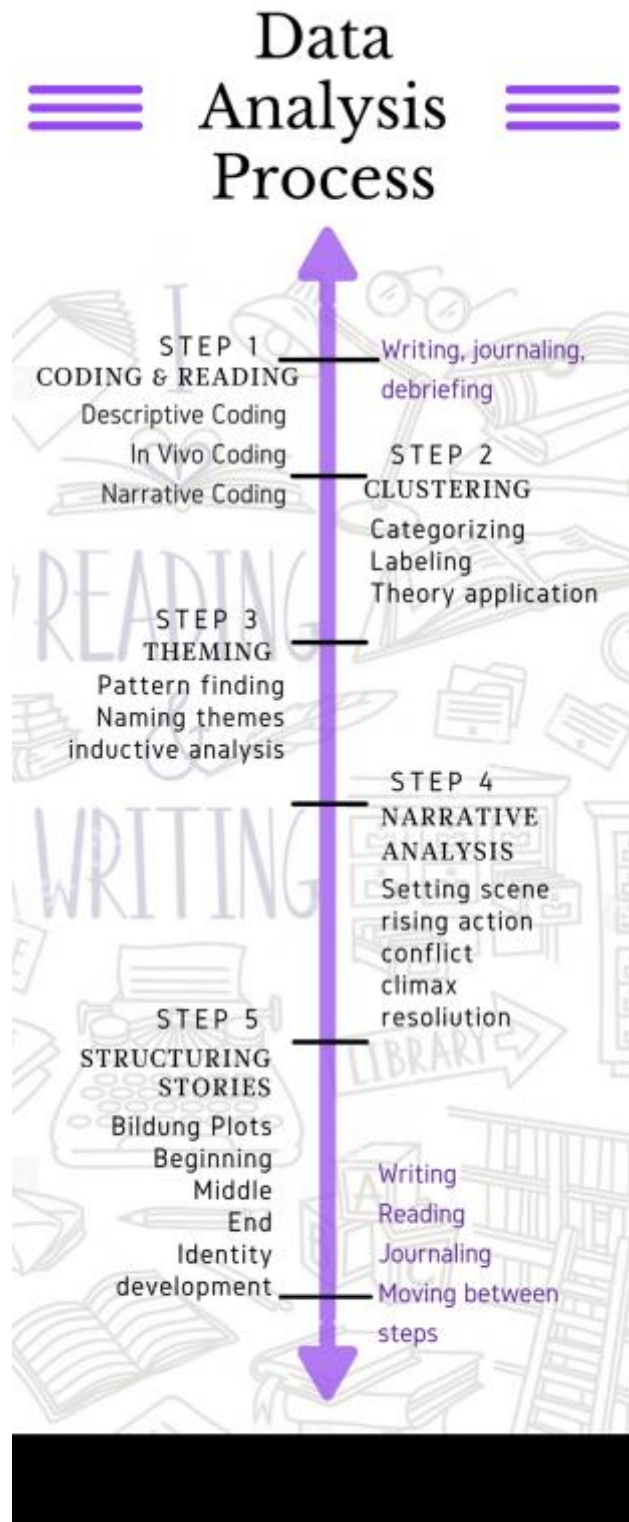Figure 3.4. Non-Linear, Iterative, Data Analysis Process

Figure 3.4. Complex, non-linear, iterative process of data analysis and Bildung creation.

All forms of coding and meaning making of the data were informed by macro-, meso-, and micro-level theoretical frameworks, research purpose and questions, and information offered in the literature review. Additionally, I remained open to whatever else emerged. I organized the data using inductive analysis, creating codes, themes, and categories to organize the information from each data source. According to Bhattacharya (2007), an inductive analysis researcher "works up from all the sources of raw data, where the researcher chunks the data into units of meaning (codes), then organizes the units of meanings (categories), and then answer analytical questions about the data to identify generalizable patterns (themes) across and within categories" (p. 88). Once I categorized the codes and synthesized the data, via inductive analysis, I began to engage in narrative analysis of the data.

I primarily worked with digital documents and it was difficult to organize and combine data within the NVivo program; therefore, I printed documents and physically began narrative analysis of the data. An example of the physical narrative analysis sample is located in Figure 3.5. Narrative analysis of the data involved identifying patterns, significant events, and transitions between experiences. Next, I started to construct narratives that challenged dominant discourses such as deficit narratives. I actively employed Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory at this stage. I looked for ways they described or defined themselves as women and specifically as Black women in different leadership contexts. For example, when coding the participants involved with Black Voices United, I listened for ways they described themselves in relation to their Black male counterparts. I did that to learn in what ways, if any, they understood themselves intersectionally within leadership roles.

Please note, while the discussion of data analysis steps is provided in a linear format, the reality is that the process of data analysis is heavily iterative and non-linear. Therefore, I moved

94

in and out of various steps already described and presented in Figure 3.4. After conducting

narrative analysis, I studied the analytical insights to create a coming of age narrative informed

by Bildungsroman, with a story plot of identity development with a beginning, middle, and end.

The interview questions were asked in a linear format, thus guiding the participants into thinking

about a linear story. However, not all participants told stories linearly, but rather how she

remembered them. Therefore, as I reviewed each transcript, I asked clarifying questions to

ensure I organized the stories in order. The end does not reflect a completion of the participant's

identity, but a representation of how the participant understood the identity development at the

time of the study. According to Kim (2016), "Bildungsroman is a German term that is a

combination of *Bildung* (formation of education) and *Roman* (a story). It is the story of one's

Bildung that focuses on one's personal growth and identity development" (p. 127). Dunlop

(2002) supported this understanding of Bildungsroman when he stated, "a Bildungsroman is

generally the story of a single individual's growth and development in the context of a defined

social order" (p. 217). Many Bildungsroman narratives follow a chronological order that is

prompted by a hardship or struggle that leads them to their journey. Organizing the research in

the form of a Bildungsroman supported the structure of the plots. Plots function to compose or

configure events into a story by:

> (a) delimiting a temporal range which marks the beginning and end of the story, (b) providing criteria for the selection of events to be included in the story (c) temporally ordering events into an unfolding movement culminating in a conclusion, and (d) clarifying or making explicit the meaning events have as contributors to the story as unified. (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7)

Thus, the data management and analysis process reflected an iterative reading and

analysis of the data to construct some understanding of the participants' identity development.

The components of identity development are a sense of self, developing unique qualities and

functioning within a larger society (Cote & Levine, 2002). These processes are complex and evolved during the study.
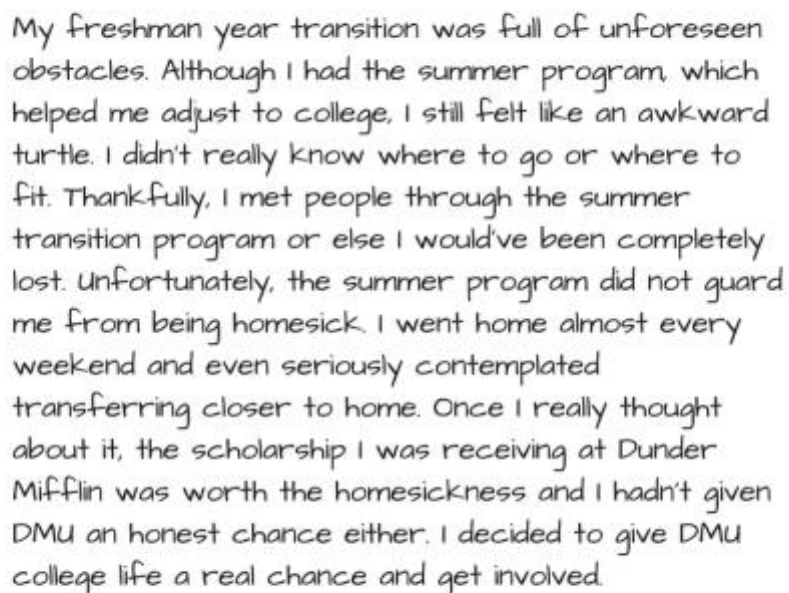
Data Representation

I used the tenets of Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought, and the Leadership Identity Development Model to construct a Bildungsroman form of representation, which is a story that depicts the coming of age experiences of the participants. Traditionally, Bildungsroman has been used to explain the maturation of young men (Jones, 1996). However, since the 1980s and 1990s, it has expanded to include underrepresented groups and women (Boes, 2006). Buckley (1974) asserted that the Bildungsroman portrays most of the following characteristics: childhood, the conflict of generations, alienation and the larger society, education and self-education, ordeal or trauma, the search for a vocation and developing a working philosophy. The developmental arcs on which this study focuses are leadership identity, racial identity, and gender identity and their intersectionality. In alignment with the aforementioned identities, I chose to write the Bildungsroman narratives in first person as well as inserted pictures to enhance the authenticity of the women's stories. I intertwined the identity development arcs by ensuring race, gender, and leadership identity development were discussed within each narrative.

Once the data were collected I had a variety of sources to choose from in order to create chronological succinct narratives that also displayed the complexity of each participant's life experiences. Therefore, I chose to write the stories with details often creating a full scene for the reader to experience. In accordance with Black Feminist Thought and self-authorship, I chose to write each participant's narrative in first person. The desire to write each narrative in first person allowed me to think in the individual participant's voice while also honoring their lived

experiences. I incorporated photo elicitations if the photograph was particularly powerful or if it was able to fill a gap in the story. I share an excerpt from Yara's story below.

Figure 3.5. Yara's excerpt from interviews

My freshman year transition was full of unforeseen obstacles. Although I had the summer program, which helped me adjust to college, I still felt like an awkward turtle. I didn't really know where to go or where to fit. Thankfully, I met people through the summer transition program or else I would've been completely lost. Unfortunately, the summer program did not guard me from being homesick. I went home almost every weekend and even seriously contemplated transferring closer to home. Once I really thought about it, the scholarship I was receiving at Dunder Mifflin was worth the homesickness and I hadn't given DMU an honest chance either. I decided to give DMU college life a real chance and get involved.

Figure 3.5. First person narrative created from Yara's interview excerpts.

The example above is an excerpt from Yara. In this excerpt she is describing her transition into college and her unforeseen challenges. Using various moments when she discussed her challenges, I constructed the first person narrative about this time in her life.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is often used in qualitative research to maintain ethical awareness of how the research affects their participants. For the purposes of this study, I used Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater's (1996) distinction between reflexivity and reflection: "to be reflective does not demand an 'other,' while to be reflexive demands both an other and some self-conscious awareness of the

process of self-scrutiny" (p.130). As I researched for this topic, I learned the importance of reflexivity and ethics. I was able to write and rewrite my positionality because I was connected to my research interest. In my participants, I wholeheartedly believed I would see myself as a collegiate leader and I recognized the importance of remaining ethical during the study. While enrolled in coursework, I had the opportunity to take an in-depth ethics courses that taught me a number of lessons in procedural ethics, "which usually involves seeking approval from a relevant ethics committee" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 263). Therefore, I conducted mock IRB applications and I wrote about how I would hypothetically handle a questionable interview situation. However, the ideas of ethics in practice, "everyday ethical issues that arise in doing research" were not addressed as heavily (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 263). Therefore, I worked closely with my advisor to discuss how to react to any everyday ethical issues. In addition, narrative case study is a personal method; asking my participants to share their life stories is sensitive and was treated accordingly. "Narrative inquirers understand that a person's lived and told stories are who they are and who they are becoming and that these stories sustain them" (Clandinin & Huber, 2014, p. 15), and honoring how to share these stories with the world at large is critical in maintaining trust and rapport with the participants as well as treating them with agency and dignity. For me to maintain trust and rapport, I also had to remain reflexive and hyper aware of each woman's reactions within the interviews.

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) not only discussed the importance of reflexivity as a tool in qualitative research but also spoke of the importance of "ethically important moments." In other words, it was imperative to remain reflexive throughout every aspect of my interactions with the participants. Ethical issues may have arisen through questions and the inclusion of all participants openly discussing their experiences in an interview. The ethical aspect of question

development is often ignored but is a central issue when a researcher proposes to study the lives of others, especially marginalized populations (Agee, 2009). According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), ethical dilemmas and concerns are a part of the everyday practice of doing research. Therefore, I allowed the participants to read the information they provided me in order to give them the opportunity to make adjustments or clarify any pieces of the narrative that were incorrect or misunderstood. This process allows for acknowledgement of the participant stories, "negotiating research texts creates space where participants' narrative authority is honored" (Clandinin & Huber, in press, p. 15). As a collaborator and researcher, I wanted to make sure their shared narratives are honored and used ethically.

Assurances of Confidentiality and Ethical Issues

Considerations of ethics are central to narrative inquiry and narrative case study. Although, ethical review is mandatory for research with human participants, the relational ethics of narrative inquiry need special consideration (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The participants had the option of selecting a pseudonym to ensure anonymity, along with the opportunity to read my findings to allow them to member check the data. The member checking technique is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member checking is a verification process whereby the participants verify the accuracy of transcriptions and findings representing their narratives and interpretations of their lived experiences. I also enlisted a peer debriefer to help me interrogate my assumptions and allowed me to see my blind spots during all stages of the study.

I anticipated the interaction I would have with the participants would potentially morph into collaboration and I was correct. As the study progressed, I anticipated ethical issues associated with their treatment or mistreatment on campus be brought to my attention as

something necessary to report. Thankfully, nothing arose, but I did discuss with them ways to pay attention to their health and well being because they counseled their peers as student leaders often. However, I was prepared to direct the participant to the appropriate student life resources on campus if a situation demanded me to do so. Additionally, I have been able to provide mentorship and guidance throughout their collegiate studies and in their roles as student leaders based on my understanding and experiences as part of my need to be reciprocal for the participants' time and generous sharing of their stories.

Academic Rigor and Trustworthiness

Qualitative research has historically been seen as lacking scientific rigor and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007). Trustworthiness is used in qualitative research to establish credibility and legitimization. Establishing academic rigor is also a representative of credibility, which aims to communicate the value of the study to the academy. Please note that while I am aware of the ways in which I can maintain due diligence in this study, it is not possible to guarantee that everyone reading my study will find the same value or rigor in my study that I wish to convey. Therefore, the best I can do is to demonstrate how I engaged in due diligence and accept that the interpretation of said due diligence will vary.

In an effort to establish trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) created four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Since then, Tracy (2010) expanded the criteria and reshaped them to add depth, rigor, and trustworthiness; her method is one I chose to use in my research. Tracy (2010) emphasized the eight criteria for excellent qualitative research.

1. Worthy Topic
2. Rich Rigor
3. Sincerity
4. Credibility

5. Resonance
6. Significant Contribution
7. Ethical
8. Meaningful Coherence (p. 840)

Choosing a worthy topic was important because I was able to apply my personal interests to a larger societal issue. To ensure richness in rigor, I selected three theories to support my study: Black Feminist Thought, Leadership Identity Development Model, and Critical Race Theory. I have been sincere throughout my research by stating my positionality early and ensuring consistency with the use of research methods. I used member checking and peer debriefing, exercising reflexivity through journaling as a way of remaining credible in this study. Using thick, rich, detailed description could create credibility, especially when those descriptions depict information in multiple data sources across the participants' varied narratives. Additionally, perhaps the depth, richness, sincerity, honesty, and vulnerability of the narratives could produce resonance amongst readers for various reasons. At the start of this study, I included a rationale for significant contribution by providing personal, social, and practical/theoretical justification for the study. Prior to beginning this research, I was reflexive about how I would approach the participants and have since thought about how I could support them through the study as well as provide opportunities for them to stop participating if they felt uncomfortable. I also ensured the participants understood my interest in this topic and my background as a Black woman student leader at a Predominantly White institution.

Overall, I followed Tracy's (2010) guidelines to ensure my research is ethical, rigorous, and socially responsible. As I wrote in the justification for this study, Black women are often forgotten in social, political, and educational movements. These narratives will help share the untold stories of Black women succeeding and leading in a predominantly White setting while addressing how their identities are impacted by their experience.

Chapter Summary

The third chapter includes the methodology for the study as well as the research design and implementation for the study. The chapter began by explaining the methods used to conduct the study. In this chapter, I situated the study generally within qualitative inquiry and specifically within narrative inquiry and case study. I demonstrated data collection, analysis, and representation strategies I used with as much details and clarity as possible. I discussed issues of researcher positionality, reflexivity, ethical considerations, and academic rigor and trustworthiness surrounding this study.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The four participants of this study were selected because they shared similarities but also they had stark differences in their experiences that brought them to their roles in leadership and identity development. To articulate their stories accurately, I chose to write them using a Bildungsroman style, which is a coming of age story, often used in various literary works. The Bildungsroman has historically been used to describe the progression of men but in more recent years has been used to express women and underrepresented groups as well (Jones, 1996; Watson, 2014). In each story, there are glimpses of intersectional identity development, its complexity, and richness. This is not to imply that their development has been completed. Their identity development will continue to be shaped with their personal and professional growth.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I wholeheartedly saw myself in each participant and even shared stories with them about my experiences of leadership, racial, and gender identity development. I found sharing personal stories helped me establish rapport, trust, and progressed the conversation or clarified a point of reference or understanding. To honor each participant's self-authoring of their narratives, I wrote these narratives in first person juxtaposing information they shared with me during interviews with Black Feminist Thought. Later in this chapter, I have included a case comparison chart to depict the complexities and similarities across each participant. Additionally, this chart serves as a map for the discussion of understanding intersectionality, navigating education, leadership development, and overcoming obstacles.

Narratives of Participants

Janelle

Janelle is a tall and fair-skinned woman in her early 20s. She was gracious when I met her and although I invited her to coffee, she insisted on paying. Her demeanor was also modest;

when I asked about her leadership activities, she brushed it off as if she did not have much going on. At the time, she was the vice president of the largest Black student organization on campus as well as the vice president of her sorority and held a regional officer position within her sorority. Like other participants, she was a full-time student. Below is her coming of age narrative informed by the discourse of Bildungsroman as I have co-constructed it with Janelle. Please note that I did not try to clean up the participants' language because that would be an inaccurate representation of how they spoke about and connected with their own experiences as they recalled them for this study.

Ubuntu: I am because we are. I've always had a strong work ethic and I learned very early how, what, and who to prioritize. My mother, Lisa, was my first role model and she instilled a strong work ethic in me. I was born and raised in Kansas City, Kansas, in a predominantly Black neighborhood. I can remember all of my friends going out to play in elementary school but I always had homework. I would sit at our oblong-shaped wooden kitchen table in my grandparents' house, which is where I spent many days after school because my mom often worked late. My grandma would make sure my sister and I had snack and then I would unpack my backpack and take out my homework. I typically had the majority of homework from my English teacher, Mrs. Parker. I was always reading a new book and writing about what I read. I'm not even sure my sister Tasha had as much homework as I did, and she was eight years older than me! I often felt like I was missing out, but it taught me to work hard in school and helped me learn the importance of school.

Although my mom worked varying hours and was not always home, when I arrived home from school, she kept my sister and I in order. I always saw my mom working; she was a very hard worker and because I had cheer practice and dance practice in addition to the massive

packets of homework my favorite teacher, Mrs. Parker, gave us, I was always busy. Sometimes I wished that I had more free time to just be a kid, but when I saw how hard my mom was working to make sure we had a good life, I knew I could handle doing my homework and doing it well. My most vivid memory from elementary school aside from my homework load and cheerleading was from the third grade.

My classmates and I were completing a census form that included race, gender, number of people living in the home, and other demographic questions. I began completing the form, taking my time to fill in the bubbles as accurately as possible. I never liked these types of tests or questionnaires because the small bubbles were strange. I always thought a check box would make more sense and be easier than filling in bubbles. I was deep in my thoughts about the inconvenience of the bubbles when my teacher, Ms. Quigley, announced to me, Laila, and Kalel to not fill in the African-American/Black bubble on the form.

"I'll come around to tell you what to mark," she said.

I immediately protested, "But… I'm Black!"

"Hold on Janelle, I'll come to your desk when I finish with Kalel," Ms. Quigley said.

When she made it to my desk, I had stopped completing the form altogether, and I was waiting for her as instructed. I tried once more to tell her that I was Black, but I said African-American instead of Black to reiterate the point.

"I'm African-American, Ms. Quigley."

Ms. Quigley turned to face me, looking annoyed as if she knew what Black and African-American were but wasn't interested in hearing about the difference between the two from a third grader. Sensing her frustration, I looked back at my paper defeated. I then listened to her instructions.

"Janelle, you need to select mulatto."

"But…," hesitantly I asked, "Why can't I select Black?"

"Just select mulatto, that's the correct selection you need to make," She snapped.

"But I'm Black," I rebutted softly because I knew she was over the discussion, but I insisted because I knew I was Black or so I thought. Before I could finish my thoughts, I looked up and I saw her heading back towards Laila to help her complete the form. I reluctantly selected mulatto, unsure of what it meant but understanding that I should listen to my teacher. I left that day and headed home to tell my mom what happened.

I had taken the time on the bus to really think about what would happen if I told my mom about this incident. I grew more and more anxious with each stop that brought me closer to my bus stop. As I walked to my house, I thought maybe mama wouldn't be home, until I saw her car parked in the driveway. I swallowed my anxiety and decided I would tell her. I approached the kitchen because I heard her cooking or doing dishes; I couldn't tell from the sounds. When I walked in, my suspicions were confirmed, she was cooking dinner. Thankfully, her back was to me because if she saw my face, I knew she would know something was wrong. Instead, I greeted her and she greeted me. I intentionally kept my distance, feeling my body language would give away my mood. She asked her usual question, when I came home from school. "How was your day, Baby?" Before I could convince myself to not tell her I hurriedly asked, "Mom, am I Black?"

She hesitated as if processing the question, "Of course you are, Baby. Why would you ask that?" I was surprised she didn't turn around, but then she was chopping vegetables again and couldn't just stop. I could tell she stopped chopping and took a deep breath.

As she inhaled and exhaled outwardly, I began telling her what happened. "Well, today in class all of us were filling out a form and my teacher told me to mark a word that started with an m like mulata or mullato. I had never seen it before. I told her I was Black and she told me to mark that "m" word. So I did. I really tried to tell her but she wouldn't listen. I thought I was Black, but after she told me to mark the "m" word, I wasn't sure what it meant and maybe it was another word for Black that I didn't know."

I couldn't see my mom's face as I told her what happened. She had begun chopping again but with much more force and speed, and from time to time, she would wipe her face with the back of her hands as if she was wiping away tears. But she wasn't chopping onions. I could tell she was upset because of her actions. I had seen her upset before but I was confused at whether or not she was upset with me or my teacher.

"Mom, are you okay? Am I in trouble?" I asked cautiously.

She turned to face me, her eyes slightly red and the knife no longer in her hands. "Janelle, you are Black and your teacher had no right to tell you anything otherwise. The word she had you mark is mulatto and it's an old term to define someone who is mixed or biracial."

"But why would she think I'm not Black? I'm Black, right?"

"Yes, you are… its just, its just that your skin is light and she thought you were biracial. Don't worry. I'm going to go up to your school tomorrow to straighten this out because this is unacceptable. She shouldn't be telling anyone what to put on a form, especially after you told her you were Black." Her voice was calm but I know it was only to reassure me that she wasn't upset. I felt bad for the fate of my teacher tomorrow, but I had to tell my mom what she had me do.

"She told two other students the same thing, but I'm not sure if it was to put mulatto on their form, too. They sit at different tables than I do."

She reached to give me a hug and a kiss on the cheek, reassuring me now with physical and verbal support. "It's okay, Baby, I want you to know you can always come to me about anything, especially when you're confused about stuff like this."

I completed my homework, but when I left the conversation, I was feeling confused at why my teacher would think I was biracial. From that day forward, I decided I wanted to learn more about my family history. As years progressed, I picked up bits of knowledge from my elders. I collected pictures and began to notice a trend among my family members. Most of them were fair-skinned Black people. I realized that I was probably not the first person in my family to be mistaken for biracial or white. It provides me comfort now to know that my appearance was inherited and is something I can't change and I don't want to change.

The next day my mother seemed calm but I knew there was a lot on her mind. She took me to school, which was unusual. We had to park in the visitor parking and walk to my class. It felt like we were walking miles and miles when we arrived at the door within two minutes from having parked the car. My mom told me to wait outside until they were finished meeting. I was pretty bummed to have to sit outside because the thick wooden doors impended my ability to hear, and I was so short that I couldn't see through the window in the door. I stood there in the hallway, leaning up against the cold brick wall. I hoped and prayed that my mom would be nice. I knew she was mad but I didn't want her to cause a scene at school. I was well liked and rarely caused trouble.

I waited for what seemed like an eternity while my mom talked to Ms. Quigley. I was nervous, and I hoped she wouldn't treat me differently afterwards. My mom came out of the

classroom looking relieved and relaxed. The crinkle that had been put on her forehead by my news yesterday had softened. My mom leaned down to hug me, kiss me, and she told me to have a good day. I hugged her back, a bit uneasy, but happy that my mom wasn't as mad as she had been.

Once my mom left, I took a deep breath and headed into the classroom. When I went to sit down, my teacher, Ms. Quigley, called me over to her desk and apologized. She let me know that she should've listened and that she would change my selection on the form to Black. I was polite and thanked her but I didn't quite get what I was thanking her for, but I knew she had probably just gotten yelled at, so I was nice to her. The class was awkward a few weeks after but eventually the climate went back to normal. I have never forgotten that incident because it has helped me to discuss my skin color and embrace the skin I'm in.

Since then, I have been mistaken for biracial multiple times and it has helped me in some cases, but I've never been called mulatto after that incident. In recent years, I learned the meaning of mulatto was rooted in negative history toward biracial couples and mixed race people and I was shocked. The idea that people continued to use such negative language was troubling. It made me question my self-worth as a fair-skinned Black girl. I found myself thinking, is that what she thought of me? I still don't know the answer to that question and I'm not sure it matters. Unfortunately, it took me years to fully process and be proud of the skin I am in. As I've learned more through my time in Black Voices United (BVU), I've realized what type of privilege I may have because I am a fair-skinned Black woman. Aside from that incident, I progressed through elementary school and into middle school fairly easily. I continued to have a lot of homework but I worked hard and made sure to get good grades. Additionally, I had an impeccable support system that helped me maintain organization in school.

I had a great family growing up, my grandparents owned a small business and often watched my sister and I when my mom was busy or had to work late. My father wasn't very involved in my life due to an addiction problem, which also caused him to become abusive and led him and my mother to divorce when I was four. Although my father wasn't around, his sister, my Auntie Kira, and his mother, my Nanny, were involved in my life. My father was absent for a significant amount of time, but I always felt connected to the paternal side of my family because of my aunt and grandmother. My father got joint custody, which provided the opportunity for us to bond and get to know one another until I was 13. It ended because my father was still abusing drugs and alcohol and my mother and her parents decided I didn't need to be around it. Joint custody meant I lived primarily with my mother, but every other weekend I would spend with my father. His house was pretty basic; most of my friends lived near my mom so I didn't have very many people to hang out with. Initially, I dreaded going over to his house, but I was glad we had that time because we had missed out on so much before. Sometimes he had to work over the weekend and I would get to hang out with my Auntie Kira and those weekends were typically more fun. She was so cool and one of my first role models. Aside from my mother, she is one of the women who influenced me to join my sorority. My paternal grandmother, Nanny, was very traditional when it came to embracing womanhood. My first experience with being a woman came shortly after I got my period.

I was in the living room watching TV when I heard my mom call for me to get the telephone. I thought it was odd because nobody called for me, but I replied, "coming" and made my way to the kitchen where our house phone was. When I arrived into the kitchen, I asked who it was and she told me it was my nanny. She called from time to time, typically to say hi. My

mom passed me the phone, which had an unusually long spiral cord to allow us to travel pretty far in the house while we were on the phone. I took the phone, not expecting what was to come.

"Hi Nanny!"

"Hey, Baby! How are you?"

"I'm fine Nanny. How are you?"

I replied respectfully because I didn't want to get into trouble for not having manners.

"I'm good. I called to tell you congratulations, you're a woman now. Your mom told me you started menstruating."

As I listened to her gleeful tone, I couldn't help but want to crawl under a rock. I knew I had to end this conversation as soon as possible. I darted a look at my mom who was now looking for something in the refrigerator. I felt betrayed by my mom, how could she tell everyone what was happening with my body?

"Um, thank you Nanny," I said quickly but confidently enough to move the conversation toward an end. Apparently, she didn't get the hint because she went on.

"I'm so proud of you. This is a big step in becoming a woman. Now you have to take care of yourself and make sure you take care of your body. Your body is going to start changing and you need to make sure you really take care of yourself. Okay, Baby?"

"Yes ma'am, thank you Nanny." I was hoping that she was done congratulating me and that she would figure out that I did not want to talk about this.

"It's really a blessing to be a woman, you can bear children and give life. God made Eve strong enough to bear children and it's a blessing. I love you, Janelle."

I thought this conversation was SO wrong that I tried again to assert myself and think of a reason to end this conversation that was so awkward and just wrong. "I love you too, Nanny. Um I have to go do homework."

"Okay, I'll let you go, talk to you soon."

"You, too! Here's mom."

Before my nanny had a chance to respond to me, I gave the phone to my mom, refusing to make eye contact with the woman that had betrayed me and told everyone my business. I announced that I was going to do homework as I walked out of the kitchen and rushed upstairs.

It was the first and really only time I ever thought about what it meant to be a woman but I also didn't feel like a woman and it didn't feel right being called a woman either. My nanny was so excited that I was "changing" and she was so proud! Honestly, I still feel like I'm learning what it feels like and means to be a woman outside of biology. Aside from embarrassing me, I really appreciated my aunt and grandmother stepping in when my dad wasn't able to. I always had dynamic women in my life. Both of my grandmothers, my aunt, mother, and sister were always around to support me, love me, and remind me that I was great. When I entered middle school, I was comfortable in my own skin and confident in my academic abilities. I had enough of doing homework all night after school, so I figured out how to do homework at school. Although it seemed like a great plan, it caused me to be a distraction in class, which landed me in In School Suspension (ISS) once. It was terrible!

I was put in ISS because I would finish my assignments in class and begin talking to my friends and then they would get into trouble for talking and I would be in trouble for distracting them. I was often threatened with ISS but I never really thought it would happen until it did because I was a good student.

I had to go on a Wednesday, and I figured ISS was simply school because my mom didn't seem worried that I was in ISS and all I knew about it was I wouldn't be able to talk much. I had heard from other students that it wasn't that bad. The day before, I was told I couldn't wear any clothes that had any name brand on it visibly. I was given the rules as soon as I entered the room; there was no talking allowed. The room seemed so cold; the only thing on the walls were those motivational posters. I guess they figured the bad kids needed motivation more than any other students. If I wanted to go to the bathroom or if I had a question, I had to raise my hand and wait for the teacher to come to me. The kids that were in school suspension were notoriously bad and were often in ISS or out of school suspension for things like fighting, bringing drugs to school, and being overall disrespectful. I just felt like my teacher was unusually harsh for making me go to ISS for talking in class, but then again I guess I was being a distraction. The way I was treated in ISS was awful and it was the longest day of my middle school career. I decided that day that I no longer wanted to be labeled a bad kid, and I decided to be better. I listened to my teachers but from time to time I got into trouble.

Ms. Stepp, another one of my teachers, seemed to have it out for me. I finished my in class assignment and was yelling across the room to one of my friends because we had been separated for talking earlier in the school year. My teacher called me to the front after my friend and I started singing in unison. I hesitantly walked to the front of the room hoping she was just going to give me busy work but really hoping I would be cutting something up or helping put together something simple. What she handed me was way different than what I expected. I looked it over and it was nothing I had ever seen us do in class before. It took me exponentially longer than anything I had done in class. However, I completed the assignment because it was fun and challenging. The next couple of days I finished my assignments and began to cause

trouble and a repeat of what happened the first day before happened again. I got strange assignments to complete as my punishment.

"What is this?" I looked at my new, unfamiliar assignment again. I questioned because it took me so much longer than my other assignments. I assumed it was like high school work so I was proud of myself for being able to do it.

"Oh, it's my homework," Ms. Stepp said nonchalantly.

"Your homework? Why do you have homework?" I was confused.

"I'm a college student," Ms. Stepp still seemed unbothered at the fact that she was giving me her college homework to do. Isn't that some form of cheating? If I have to do my homework, why wouldn't she have to do hers?

"Well, if I'm doing your work, am I getting extra credit for it?" I figured I should get something out of it for helping her out.

"No, I just need to keep you busy and not distract your classmates."

"That's not right, I should get extra credit," I protested.

"Janelle, if you keep disrupting class, you'll have to go to ISS or you can do this work. You decide."

"I guess I'll do this work then," I grumbled. I felt uneasy about it because if somebody else did my work, I would get into trouble, so why wasn't she getting in trouble? Plus, she told me she was getting good grades on her work, but I was doing it and I wasn't getting anything from it. I didn't want to go back to ISS but I just knew this wasn't right. I decided to tell my mom that she was getting credit for something I was doing. I almost regretted telling because I knew how my mom could be, but I also knew it wasn't okay.

Unlike with the mulatto incident, my mom came to school and was outwardly upset after she learned that I was doing Ms. Stepp's homework as my punishment or else I would have to be in ISS. My mom had me wait outside and I tried to press my face against the door to hear but I couldn't make it out again. From muffled noises before the door closed, this was all that I could hear.

"Oh, hi, Mrs. Hightower."

"Hi, Ms. Stepp."

"To what do I owe this surprise?"

After the meeting, I was allowed in the room and it was so awkward. Ms. Stepp didn't have anything to say. She simply apologized to us both prior to my mother leaving. She then showed us out, and I don't think Ms. Stepp ever told me I was talking too much in class again. However, my mom told me to stop talking in her class. She didn't want to come back up to the school if she didn't have to, but she also told me to remember the day I was in ISS and to start acting "like I had sense" in class. I'm glad my mom didn't yell at me in front of Ms. Stepp, but I knew that she wasn't happy about having to miss work to come to my school. My mom didn't condone me talking in class when I was told not to, but she definitely always had my back when I was being wronged. Although she was more aggressive than I would have liked, she was effective.

<center>***</center>

I was glad to be going to high school and I had a unique opportunity to discover a skill I didn't know I had—basketball. My best friend played basketball and had played most of her life, as I did with cheerleading. Well, when it came time to try out for basketball, she convinced me I needed to try out. We were walking down the hallway heading to fourth period English when

<center>115</center>

she brought it up. She bet me $5 that I would make the team if she worked with me. I thought the entire idea was laughable, but I also figured I could use the $5.

Try-outs approached and I was ready to NOT make the team. However, I put my best foot forward and it turned out I was much better than I expected. When Coach Pete posted that I made the team, I wasn't as surprised because I did well in the try-outs. However, I was surprised that he suggested that my best friend and I be Co-Captains. I'm not sure what the coach saw in me. I was so surprised, because I wouldn't have considered myself a leader. I actually think I'm pretty weird, but I guess Coach Pete didn't think so. Basketball was cool, and cheerleading was still my favorite sport, but I did learn that I had some leadership skills. I'm not sure where or when I got them, but adults seemed to look to me to lead; and although it made me uncomfortable, I wasn't opposed to the idea of being "voluntold" to lead.

High school was a challenge emotionally outside of sports because I had issues with my hair and decided to cut it all off, without notice. I was getting my hair relaxed, but because I sweated so much playing sports, I always ruined my perms. My mom and I were frustrated because we were wasting money on relaxers. We made the decision to cut my hair one day after a third relaxer had been ruined. After we went to the salon, my hair was super short because I was basically trying to cut all the chemicals out of my hair. I cut it so low, I looked like a boy and I was so worried about going back to school. When I returned to school that Monday with no hair, I received the most awkward stares and comments in the bathroom, in the hallway; it didn't matter where I was, I couldn't escape it. People asked me if I had cancer, was I Albino, if I wanted to be a boy, and many insulting questions. I came home crying to my mom because people thought the craziest things. I was so strong just a few days before, but I had no idea what to expect. I was devastated. I felt ugly and thought my hair would never, ever grow back.

I'll never forget what my mom said. "Baby, hair is hair. Dry your face, it'll grow back. You have to learn to filter out the mess people say, you have to make sure you wear earrings because people will think you're a boy. You are beautiful and you know your worth so what does it matter what they say?"

My mom joked with me, but was also real. It took some time but I gained the confidence to face my peers and the questions and let everyone know that I CHOSE to cut my hair. I'm not an Albino, not that there is anything wrong with being one, and I'm still a girl. It was a challenge but my hair did grow back and as my hair grew, my confidence did too.

In addition to sports, I also had the opportunity to be chosen for the Wesley Scholarship that would provide guidance and preparation for college. The program actually began in middle school but the preparatory portion and select classes began in high school. The benefits were great, and my entire high school was introduced to college because of the program. We all took specific classes, participated in service projects, took ACT/SAT preparatory classes, and visited various college campuses. The scholarship was a big deal because it provided for tuition, books, housing, and a meal plan. The demographic of my high school was primarily Black, Latino, and low-income students, so this option to go to college may not have been available for many of us without the Wesley Scholarship. Most of my inspiration for wanting to go to college was because I saw older students receiving scholarships and university acceptance letters. In addition to the letters and notoriety I could receive, I also wanted to continue to cheer and I knew collegiate cheering was the way to go. And that is how I got into Dunder Mifflin University (DMU).

Cheerleading try-outs at DMU was another time when I realized what skin I was in. I believe I was one of 10 Black girls trying out with a total of 250 people in attendance. It was

definitely a culture shock even though I knew I would be attending a predominantly White institution. I had not thought about what it would feel like to be one of few people of color in a sea of white people. I was elated when I made the team, and I was thankful to be a cheerleader my first year at Dunder Mifflin University. At the end of tryouts, there ended up being a total of four Black girls on the cheerleading squad, which helped us create community on the team. Additionally, our coach was also very open to us wearing our hair natural and just okay with us being "us," which made the transition to college easier. I never felt like I needed to be someone that I wasn't in order to fit in with the other girls on the team. Unfortunately, my academic transition was difficult because the college classes I took were more rigorous than I expected. Prior to college, I had always been a good student, and I picked up subjects easily but I had to use my time management skills to succeed academically. I quickly learned to ask for help in order to maintain my grade point average, which allowed me to cheer and keep my scholarship.

As I adjusted to the workload of college and moved into my major courses, in my junior year, I decided I needed to discontinue cheerleading. I was grateful for the experience and the relationships I gained from it but I knew I couldn't cheer forever. I decided to focus more on school and the student organizations I was in. I continued to volunteer for a local children's cheerleading squad through my commitment in the Anderson Leadership Fellows program, but collegiate cheering was too much of a time commitment. The Anderson Leadership Fellows program was awesome, similar to cheerleading; the diversity of members within the leadership fellows program was low. I was one of four Black students out of 60 chosen to be fellows. I often felt like I needed to be a voice for ALL Black people within Anderson Leadership Fellows. Although I think it helps to bridge the gap about race, it is also frustrating to always have to explain why racism is happening and that it still hurts.

In my junior year, I also joined a sorority, and because our chapter was so small, I became an officer the same semester I was initiated, and the following semester I became a regional board member. My advisor came to me and suggested that I run for a national undergraduate representative position. I didn't feel ready to run for such a huge position, because I was so young, but I listened to her advice and pursued the position. I was not elected but it opened doors for me to serve on a regional level. I was honored and being so close to administration in our organization gave me the opportunity to learn from Black women leaders that span all walks of life from housewives to state judges. In my historically Black sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., I have gained a greater sense of sisterhood. The relationships I've formed through my sorority have provided me intergenerational support from my advisor to my co-initiates. Additionally, when I learned my Auntie Kira used to be in my sorority, it showed me that I was drawn towards this organization and its values at a young age. Alpha Kappa Alpha has given me another avenue to serve others and it is one of the reasons I love being in my sorority. Another way I stepped into my leadership abilities in college was through BVU.

When I was a junior, I was also heavily involved in the Black Voices United and I was once again "voluntold" to run for office. My advisor, Thomas, is from the same county as I am in Kansas City. His expertise and advice have always been valued by me and my peers that I went to high school with because we knew he understood our struggles and our background. He also serves as a pillar of hope. He represents what we can be, which in itself is encouraging. When discussing the future of BVU, he stopped me on the way out of a meeting one day and simply asked me, "So what position are you going to run for?"

He caught me off guard because I was prepared to be a general member and relax, especially with my sorority commitments. "What do you mean? I just want to be a regular member."

Surprised yet firm, he replied, "No, you can't do that. We need you, your talent, and your voice. So president or vice president?" I was being "voluntold" again. My choices were limited.

Chuckling and shocked I said, "Whoa! President or Vice-President? That's a big jump from social chair?"

"Yes, but you are a dynamic leader and we need your leadership." He made his case and left me to ponder what was just requested, or demanded perhaps.

I was reluctant about running for a higher office at first because I didn't think people would take me seriously. As the social media chair, I helped with a few controversial issues BVU had to handle, like the racist comments that were made on Yik Yak, an anonymous social media network, after we did a silent protest that involved us lying down in the student union for four minutes to call attention to the Michael Brown murder in 2015. Someone said, "somebody call the KKK." While another person said, "just go feed them watermelon." It was yet another time that reminded me of my Blackness on campus and that I needed to be as unified as possible with the Black students and Black community on campus. After the racial incidents, I decided that I needed to run for office. I approached Thomas at the next BVU meeting excited. I told him that I would run and he was happy and told me he truly believed I would be a great VP. The one thing I liked about Thomas was how supportive of his students he was. I always knew he loved his students, but if I forgot, he showed us daily. He appreciated us and he praised us for our hard work, and that was refreshing and I think it kept some students here.

Figure 4.1. Black Voices United Meeting

Figure 4.1. A picture taken to illustrate Janelle's leadership commitments. That evening BVU invited a corporate guest speaker.

Although, I had done leadership work before and I was pursuing a leadership minor, I was more of a behind-the-scenes person. The challenge of potentially becoming a vice president was a ton of responsibility. However, I ran, and to my surprise, I won. I was surprised that I had that much influence over my peers, but I knew that I could not let them or myself down if I accepted the position. It has been challenging but well worth it. I feel like I have grown up so much already and I also know that there is so much further to go. From the time I was told I was a mulatto to being comfortable in my skin, in being a leader and in realizing how other people see me as Black in white spaces, as a Black sister with other Black sisters, I feel like I am continuously learning and growing.

But I am appreciative of my mentors and the on-campus "family" that keep me simultaneously grounded and uplifted. I hope that I am helping the Black student body to stay in college, graduate, and get jobs. I hope that people have seen me as a hard worker and someone that genuinely cares about the lives of Black people at DMU. I know our organization has influence and I hope that when people see me, they see someone that is "down for them" that won't let them fall, that sees their success as our success.

Issa

Issa is a short, brown-skinned, young lady in her early 20s. She was very busy student-teaching and managing her life, similarly to the other participants, and we often met at odd times. However, she was always flexible and willing to work with me. She had a unique story and was the only transfer student in the study, which made her uniquely different from the other participants. Although Issa described herself as lacking boldness, I found that she was actually more outspoken and steadfast in her beliefs. Our co-constructed narrative of her experiences is shared below in her first person voice, as analyzed and synthesized from the interviews. This is co-constructed because I constructed the narrative from interviews and shared it with Issa, who then made her changes, after which we discussed what would be finally shared in this document. Please note again that I tried to leave the narratives as closely as they were spoken during the interviews without trying to polish them for grammatical errors, sentence structure, etc. This was in alignment with maintaining a self-authoring voice, whichever way it emerged, as long as the narratives remained coherent.

Nevertheless, she persisted. I was raised around white people. Growing up in the middle of rural central Kansas didn't leave space for me to meet many Black people or anyone that wasn't white. The few Black people I interacted with, I either lived with or those with whom I attended church. The children that went to my church were older or younger than me, none of them were in my grade, and some days it felt lonely because they just didn't know what was happening in my life.

My parents divorced when I was three. Although I don't recall much about that situation, I never felt abandoned. My mother became a single parent overnight, but my brother and I never felt as if we were missing out. She provided for us and I was eventually able to create a

122

relationship with my father later in life. School was a place where I felt comfortable because I performed well in school. It didn't matter that I never had any Black teachers because for some reason, I always saw myself as a teacher. However, I never thought about race and the idea that I was Black and certainly never felt different until around middle school. I distinctly remember my first experience with racism happening at a friend's home. I was spending the night over at my best friend Jillian's house and we had been playing games and really having a great time. Jillian was a white girl with blonde wavy hair and brown eyes. We always hung out at school and she was the only one of my friends with whom I could spend the night. I didn't get the opportunity to spend the night over friends' houses often because my mom was pretty strict so I was soaking up every minute at Jillian's. We were preparing for bed and she had just left to use the restroom, so I decided to sit at her vanity dresser and use her brush to brush my hair. Her brush was thinner than the brush I had at home but I figured it would do the trick. I just wanted to get it prepped to put my scarf on. When she walked in, she yelled at me, "Get your dirty hair out of my brush!"

"What?" I said, caught off guard, and shocked at her tone. When I made eye contact with her, I noticed she looked disgusted and repeated her barking command.

"Get your dirty hair out of my brush! Why did you use my brush?"

Intimidated and processing as fast as I could what was happening, I tried to say something. "I just… I don't know, we usually share stuff."

"Well not my brush, that's gross," she said with much conviction and intention.

"Sorry, I didn't think it was a big deal," I said, attempting to shrug it off.

"Well I don't want your hair in my brush."

She was so adamant that I immediately felt uncomfortable and I just wanted to go to sleep in hopes that tomorrow would be better. "Let's just go to bed," I suggested as I walked to get into my sleeping bag. I attempted to settle in but I felt a lump in my throat as I fought back tears. I wasn't sure why I wanted to cry, but I just kept replaying her voice and facial expressions in my mind like a highlight reel. I was so caught off guard because we had shared stuff before and my hair wasn't dirty at all. I attempted to justify her reaction, but I couldn't. I felt so sad and confused like she had taken a piece of my soul. In addition to the highlight reel, my mind began to race, why would she call me dirty? My hair was straight; it wasn't my natural curly texture. Did she think I was dirty? She was my friend, but I didn't really want to be her friend at that point. I eventually fell asleep with my final thought of the night being that she thought of me as dirty. The next morning, we didn't talk about it and I didn't tell my mom or anyone really ever. Our friendship wasn't the same since that night, and that was fine with me because after she said that to me, she didn't feel like much of a friend.

I reflect on that incident from time to time and it was so hurtful and just mean. I still see her occasionally because she also attends DMU, but I wouldn't say we are friends anymore, and I'm not sure if I knew it was racism then, but now it is evident that she learned that idea somewhere and it was racially motivated. I'm not sure if she understood what she was saying at that time nor how hurtful it could be, but then again, outside of my gut reaction, I wasn't sure what to make of the comment at the time. I wish I would have said something then, but I've never really been a confrontational person, and in that moment I was too upset and felt misunderstood to say anything to her. All I could think of was that I was different but not dirty. Aside from that incident, middle school was already awkward. Most everyone was confused about their ever-changing bodies and as a typical preteen, life was blown out of proportion, and

my life was no different. Fortunately, my development into womanhood was anticlimactic but also overwhelming. My mother and I had the conversation about my "cycle," as she called it. I knew I would bleed from my privates and that it could potentially be painful and cause cramping. I knew that I would be able to have children afterwards, which was weird because why would I want to have kids now. All of it was strange and I was even more upset that my brother didn't have to deal with this "cycle" business. My cycle came randomly and I freaked!

"Moooooommmmmmmmm!!!!" I panicked and looked to find something to stop the bleeding. I was in the upstairs bathroom, which I shared with my brother.

"What, Issa?" She yelled across the house.

"I'm bleeding!" I said frantically and panicked.

"Get a bandaid and stop yelling across my house!" she yelled back.

"I can't, I need your help. Can you come here?" I suppose she sensed the fright in my voice and before I could collect my thoughts, I heard a knock at the door. Thankfully, my mom came quickly. Oddly enough she was smiling so wide you could see all her teeth.

"Today is the day, do you remember what I told you about today?"

"Uh, that it's going to hurt?" I said confused at why she was so excited.

"What? No, you're a woman now."

"A woman? When did I become a woman?"

"This is your first step into womanhood. Remember we talked about this happening soon?"

"I know but I didn't know it was going to happen so soon. Can I go hide under my covers? How long is this cycle supposed to happen again?"

"3-6 days, it's not very long."

"3-6 days! Not long? Mom! I can't leave the house like this!!" I argued.

"No, Is, you have to go to school and church and do stuff, millions of women do it everyday."

"Ugh okay."

I was so upset, but I knew my mom was right. I would have to deal with it, but I was not happy about this and I still thought it was super unfair that I only had to deal with it and not my brother. She eventually showed me how to use feminine products, and I adjusted to having my "cycle," but that day I felt like my world was ending. Thankfully, most of the other girls were also getting their periods so it wasn't as big of a deal because I was not experiencing it alone.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

One of the only great happenings of middle school was my introduction to church by my grandfather Charles's wife, Robyn. My mother was a Christian, but she did not attend church. However, she welcomed my involvement so much so that she eventually made me take my brother with me. I love my brother, but I wanted church to be a solo activity. I suppose it was my limited opportunity to express my true feelings. So when she told me I was taking my brother to church, it was one of the few times I attempted to protest. I was sitting in the living room watching TV when she came in from the kitchen to make her request. I quickly gave up the protests because when it came to my mom, my brother and I always lost. My mom was definitely an authoritarian, which I guess she had to be since she had to be both mom and dad. Sometimes I was frustrated with her because there was never wiggle room for negotiations, but she pushed me to become the person that I am today.

Church proved to be a positive place for my brother and me to go. I was the oldest so I had to take care of him, which was sometimes a burden. My brother has autism, so sometimes I

felt like I had to defend him and just make sure he wasn't being taken advantage of in any situation at church or otherwise. Other than watching my brother, church came with another opportunity. I certainly did not anticipate church being an opportunity for leadership development, but I'll never forget being told to record church service at the age of 11. All of the kids had a role in our church because it was so small. So some sang in the choir, ushered, or helped pass out programs. I was still adjusting to being a general member when I was approached to record service. My brother and I were waiting for the church bus to leave to take us home. Typically we helped clean up after service and waited in the foyer of the church until it was time to load up in the bus. I was telling my brother to fix his shirt when the pastor's wife approached me from the sanctuary. She was always so friendly and dressed so nice. I thought she was a nice lady. She always greeted my brother and me with a hug, and this time was not any different.

"Hi, First Lady Wilson," I greeted the pastor's wife.

"How ya'll doing baby?" She is so cheerful!

"We're fine ma'am. We're just waiting for the bus to leave."

"Okay, Issa we need you to record service next week."

I thought she was joking because I was just a kid. Surely, I am too young for this. So, I replied with a polite smile and a chuckle, "Uuuuhhhh Ma'am, I don't think I'll be good for that."

"Yes, you will," she said with a matter-of-fact tone and continued, "God wouldn't give you more than you can bear. Didn't you hear what the pastor said in service today?"

"Yes, ma'am I was listening, but I'm just a kid. Shouldn't a grown up do that job?" I asked her in my most respectful and thoughtful, yet mature, tone.

"All the adults are busy and you can do it, you're smart and one of the oldest kids here. All of our other kids have jobs, and you'd be great at this," she explained and continued. "Besides, someone will help you and show you what to do the first few weeks until you get the hang of things."

I realized that, similar to my mom, First Lady Wilson was not going to take no for an answer. So I thought at least someone would be there to help me in case I messed up. The next Sunday came and I was so nervous, scared, and just unsure of myself. I instantly questioned, why me, will I mess up, will I get into trouble, and this is such a bad idea. I wore a comfortable outfit to church that day because I didn't know what I would have to do so I wanted to feel comfortable. When it was time for me to begin recording, I was greeted by one of the deacons. Deacon White showed me the record, stop, and volume button and then he went to take his seat on the pulpit. I immediately panicked because Lady Wilson told me I would have much more help than what Deacon White had given me. Inside, I was screaming, "Help," but outside I tried to keep it together. Before I had a chance to ask for help, service started and I was forced to figure it out as it went along. Thankfully, it all went fine. I recorded the service good enough for them to keep me on the job. I learned quickly and eventually began to take ownership of this mundane, yet important task. The church recordings helped the pastor see his sermons and they were sold for profit, so I really felt like I was contributing and adding value to the church through recording service. I began to look at my church as my community and a valuable necessary part of my village.

As I progressed through school, my passion for teaching grew. The motivation to teach coupled with my mother's threat that I either go to college or be homeless made college the obvious choice. My junior year was the year to begin thinking about college and even applying

for early admission. I sat at the kitchen table looking on the family laptop at local colleges when I decided to talk to my mom about her college experience. She had been working during the day and attending college at night for the past few years in order to get her degree. I was so proud of her, and she showed me that college was hard and doable for her, but I doubted how well I would do.

"Mom, I think I want to go to college, but it seems like it's so hard. Like you are always so busy."

"Oh, honey you're going to college," she said bluntly.

"But what if I don't want to go to college?" I was curious if I had any other option.

"Well you can't stay here, so either you're going to college or you can be homeless." Clearly not playing, she stopped what she was doing and sat at the table next to me. Knowing her college or homeless policy, I decided to keep talking and maybe joke with her a little.

"But dang, I mean you didn't go to college right after high school. Why do I need to?" Ha! I thought I had her cornered.

"No I didn't, but you're not me, and I'm going to college now, so that you and your brother can have better opportunities. And that better opportunity is college." She is just so annoying when she is right.

"I mean, I want to go, but that's kind of harsh," I said with my voice cheery and with a big smile, so she knew I had been joking.

"I gotta be harsh so you know I'm not playing. You're going to college little girl. So stop playing and look up the application process for these places," she said, poking me in the forehead with her index finger, as if to bring attention to my brainpower.

When looking at colleges, I only applied to one, which was my mother's alma mater, Chilton State University. I didn't really feel like applying to a bunch of colleges and I didn't think I needed to. I guess I was afraid of the rejection, and I didn't think I would get in to the bigger schools in the state. The day I received my acceptance letter was a beautiful day that I remember vividly. It was a warm spring day in April. I had been checking the mail everyday when I got home from school, hoping that the letter would be there, and that day it was there along with an electric bill. When I saw it, I rushed into the house to read it, but I needed my mom and brother with me. I yelled for my mom and brother to come downstairs. We all sat huddled up around the kitchen table anxiously awaiting the news. I felt like my heart was going to jump out of my chest, I was so anxious, nervous, excited. I opened the envelope slowly, it was somewhat of a thick envelope, so I figured that maybe it was not just a simple rejection letter and that it had good news. And there it was. A letter from Chilton State that I was admitted to their college. I was worried about nothing, because they did not reject me. I was so excited that right then and there I told my mom that I had only applied to one college. She was furious but eventually got over it because after all I had gotten in, so I didn't need to apply to any other colleges.

Although I received random outbursts and pushback from my mom because of my choice to only apply to one school, I did receive financial support for attending. Prior to entering college, I was accepted into a program called Horizons that supported students of color entering Chilton State University in their freshman year. I was able to move in early and attend a new student orientation and mentor program that would support us during our first year. The first day of college, I had no idea where the student union was, but I saw another Black guy walking and I figured he knew where the union was located, so I started following him. I hoped he would not

turn around and think I was a strange stalker. Thankfully, I chose right and we were headed to the same place. This could also have ended badly had he entered another building or headed to the men's bathroom. My first year at Chilton State University (CSU) was cool, socially. I met a ton of people through Horizons, and I learned about the Black Voices United (BVU), a group for Black students to organize and create community on campus. I decided I should get involved on campus and start with BVU. Off campus, the town was pretty dead and extremely white so most people partied from Thursday to Monday because there wasn't much else to do. That wasn't really my scene, so I stayed away from nightlife on days other than Saturdays.

However, my first semester academically was not so great. I realized very quickly I did not learn study skills in high school and that paired with the fact that I loved to take naps was not a great combination. I basically decided to do better the next semester and I began attending study halls with the Black Voices United, and my grades improved drastically. I pretty much just faked it until I made it. Overall, the experience I had at Chilton State University (CSU) I would equate it to a community college because I wasn't challenged and I knew I could handle more. Thankfully through the BVU, I attended a regional Black Student government conference at Dunder Mifflin University, a larger state school, and I decided that I wanted to transfer.

Figure 4.2. DMU Administration Building

Figure 4.2. A picture of the DMU administration building as an image Issa described as symbolic of her transition to DMU.

The conference was powerful. I learned so much about being a student activist, and I realized that some of the comments I had been hearing all my life that made me feel weird were microaggressions. That was a new term I learned, even though I had plenty of experiences that could be considered microaggressions. The experience with my childhood best friend was an example, but I realized little things like someone telling me I "talked white" was yet another thing I had to combat as a microaggression. I left the conference at DMU energized and so proud to have the Black woman leader, Jacqui, at Chilton State University. Jacqui was the first person that helped me realize that I could be a leader and that I was an asset to a team. She encouraged me so much that I decided to run for the officer position of secretary for Black Voices United. However, she didn't really need to convince me much because I already wanted to run for the position after the DMU leadership conference. My year as a secretary provided me with the confidence to help other Black students and support them in their endeavors at CSU. The confidence I gained at Chilton State University I took with me to DMU. It is one of the reasons I chose to run for office at DMU. I had experience and I knew I would be an asset and I

knew proper etiquette as a secretary. It isn't the most attractive job, but it is necessary to having an effective organization, in my opinion.

As soon as I arrived at DMU, I sought out Black Voices United (BVU) and signed up for as many committees I could in order to get involved. I eventually gained attention for my dedication, and I ran and won the position of secretary in BVU. It was a familiar feeling, but I felt even more accomplished than I did at my previous college. The BVU at DMU had a more social and civic duty focus. At CSU, the BVU was more of a social organization, but at DMU, we made sure that social change was central to our mission. It was also about three times the size of the other BVU, so I felt very accomplished when I was given the opportunity to serve as secretary. I was honestly surprised because I hadn't been on campus very long and although I know I worked hard, I didn't exactly know what to expect from DMU and the BVU in particular.

The DMU Black Voices United (BVU) experience came with different challenges both organizationally and personally. A personal challenge included the ways in which I was approached about my natural hair and the other was racially motivated. I wasn't expecting my hair, that was worn in a large afro at the time, to affect my leadership in BVU until I became known by "The Fro." At first I found it flattering, but I eventually felt as if I wasn't being noticed for who I was but only for my hair. So I cut my hair. Cutting my hair was a symbol of resistance to the beauty standards but it also made me symbolically say, now that "The Fro" is gone, what will you call me? It may not have done much for others, but I was proud of myself for cutting my hair. The other challenge included racist comments made on an anonymous social media website after the BVU did a silent protest after the murder of Michael Brown by a police officer. It really solidified that some people may not like me simply because I'm Black and because the comments were anonymous, I could be sitting next to the person in class who wrote

those comments and never know. It took me back to my experience of racism at my high school job at a fast food place.

I was about 16 at that time. I worked at a regional burger and ice cream fast food restaurant. I was checking out a customer when the register jammed. The customer was a middle-aged white guy, with a beer belly, and wore a t-shirt, jeans, and a work jacket that had the name Tom on it. I was frustrated because it had been having problems all day and it required a manager to fix the problem.

"Aw man. Sorry sir, I'm having some difficulties with the register. Skya, can you get the manager?" I gave customer-Tom an update to let him know we were working fast.

"Sure thing," said Skya, my coworker, as she went to get our manager, Mandy.

"So they won't let you work the register?" Customer-Tom chuckled and was condescending in his tone at my lack of power to work my own register. He folded his arms over his chest and kept staring at me.

"Um, no. It's not working correctly." I was frustrated with the question and the malfunctioning register.

"Yea sure, they won't let you work the register," Customer-Tom repeated himself, as if to suggest that there must have been some reason why I don't have the access to my register. Like as if it was my character failure, which determined my lack of access to the register.

"Hey Issa, what's the problem?" Mandy, the manager, had arrived on the scene.

"I'm not sure. It seems to be jammed." I was already really uncomfortable by now.

"Well, let me see. Sir what did you order?" Mandy stepped forward in front of the register and asked Customer-Tom.

Customer-Tom smirked, shook his head and repeated his order. "Yea, uh a number 6 with a cherry limeade."

I stood there upset that the register jammed on my watch and I couldn't prove to this bigot that I could work the register as good as anyone else, and that there was no suspicious reason for my lack of access to the register. I chose to ignore him and focus on my job, but the situation made me question if I was being too sensitive or if it was okay to be upset. After I had time to reflect, I realized it was a microaggression, and I was upset because I didn't say anything and I just let it go. One of the things I'm most grateful for my experience as an officer in BVU is the assurance of myself I've gained along with the knowledge to empower myself to speak out about injustices. I'm not naturally outspoken, but I believe I'm a tad bolder than the girl that transferred to Dunder Mifflin University three years ago.

The academic aspect of my pre-service teacher program wasn't challenging for me, but I sometimes felt people walked on eggshells because I was the only person of color in my class. Whenever diversity was mentioned, my classmates would often attempt to highlight that diversity is not only about skin color. And although I believe they did not intend anything negative, I grew frustrated in class often. One of the most frustrating parts of listening to my peers invalidate skin color as diversity made me feel invalidated as well. Unfortunately, I was the only Black person or any person of color pursuing a degree in teacher education in my cohort, so I didn't have another person to use as a sounding board or to even help support my arguments. Therefore, I often felt lonely and misunderstood in class. Contradicting my peers' discussions about diversity, I was often looked to as the token and voice of all groups, not only just Black people, but all people of differences, during discussions about diversity. It was as if I

135

was the President of Diversity or some National Ambassador of Diversity. If skin color is not

the only thing that makes us diverse, then why was I made to be the spokesperson of diversity?

Some days it seemed as if they assumed I was one-dimensional and could only discuss

diversity, but when other topics arose, I was suddenly this misinformed or unaware person. It

was upsetting to be the only Black person in teacher education, and I don't know if it is even the

fault of the college. I know that a lot of my Black peers aren't drawn to education because of

budget cuts and low salaries, but I think we need more Black teachers. I think Black students

receive a different experience and should at least see one Black teacher in their lifetime. I did

not have the opportunity to have a Black teacher, and thankfully, my students won't have the

same experience.

Many people ask me why I would want to be a teacher because I never saw a Black

teacher in my entire K-12 and collegiate career, even after transferring to a larger state school. I

knew I was meant to be a teacher. I love teaching. It never crossed my mind to be anything else

because I knew teaching was my destiny. I met many roadblocks, transferring and having to take

more classes than I wanted to at DMU. Then when I finally made it to student teaching, I met

obstacles with my cooperating teacher, Becky. Becky was a woman in her early 40s, divorced,

no children of her own, and had been at her job for 10 years.

We were working on a pep rally for our students and they needed facts to present as a

part of their pep rally. So I took my phone out to Google some ideas. It was actually pretty odd

because I don't ever have my phone on me in the classroom because I don't want to be

distracted. I opened the search engine when my cooperating teacher called me over.

"Issa, I need to speak with you," Becky had an authoritative tone.

I was a little nervous because she never seemed to like me very much and always made comments about me not doing my work, although I was always on time and never had my phone and I did most of her work in addition to my own. However, I looked up, smiled, and told the students that I would be right back.

"Sure, what would you like to talk about?"

"Well, I noticed you've been on your phone a lot and none of the other student teachers have their phones out during work. You can't be a good teacher and be on your phone all the time," Becky maintained eye contact and even had her arms crossed as if I was bothering her.

Puzzled and annoyed, I attempted to respond controlling any disdain in my voice, "I was only using my phone to look up ideas." I bit my tongue to stop myself from telling Becky exactly how I felt about her less than enthusiastic teaching style. I continued to offer a solution that I thought could please her, "Well, I will keep my phone away when I don't use it but I was using it for work." I know I probably didn't have to repeat that part but she needed to know I was doing work.

Becky rebutted, visibly annoyed, and she leaned in closer to me to say, "If you keep up this behavior, I'm going to have to report you to Dr. Fox, and that could affect your graduation."

Now I was pissed because she obviously threatened my wellbeing and my future over me doing my work. I took a step back and chuckled out of disbelief, "Wait, I don't see why that would be necessary, I've been a great student teacher this semester." I defended myself with all the confidence I could muster, being fully aware that my assertion could be perceived as being intimidating and having an attitude or perhaps a chip on my shoulder.

As Becky sat back in her chair, she unfolded her arms and began to organize papers on her desk and said, "Well I'm not sure I agree with that, but I really need you to step it up." Eventually, she did tell Dr. Fox on me and I had to meet with him.

Figure 4.3. Student Teaching Space

Figure 4.3. This is the area that Issa was designated during her student teaching experience. She took this photograph to illustrate her daily events.

I recalled something my mom often said to me when I was down. She would say, "Issa, the only opinion that matters is your own." Nevertheless, I persisted through student teaching because I knew I would be someone's only Black teacher and I want other Black kids, especially Black girls, to see me and know they can do whatever they set their minds to do. They can lead, they are smart and they can succeed, because I did. From being a recorder at church to now being a student leader and becoming a teacher, I would say that I have understood so much about where my strength is, who I can go to for support, how to understand my weaknesses and improve on them, and how to not be afraid to step it up and realize that I can always do better and make an impact at a larger scale. This is why I moved from a smaller school to DMU and sought out experiences of leadership at a much larger scale than before, which allowed me to

gain a sense of confidence that I did not have earlier. My students will now see a confident, assertive Black teacher who is not afraid to learn, but who also cares deeply about her students.

 Yara

Yara, a woman also in her early 20s, is about 5'1" tall, and has a light brown complexion. Often, she wore her hair in a bun. Yara and I met on campus and we quickly became friends. She was willing to participate in the study without any reservations before we finished our first meeting. She was one of the most creative participants I worked with because of how she took my instructions and created her own artifacts for this study. I was always so intrigued by her interpretations of her artifacts, interview questions, and photo elicitations. She helped me think outside the box and more creatively, which I enjoyed. Below is her coming of age story, as we both understood it.

Figure 4.4. Yara's depiction of Black Women Leaders.

Figure 4.4. Yara discovered this photograph when searching for images of Black women leaders online. She believed this is how she saw herself *breaking* through the field of business as a Black woman leader.

Diamond in the rough. I guess I always wondered who I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to do. My early life was pretty dark. I never met and have no idea who my biological father is, and my biological mother was unstable and couldn't take care of my sister and I. At

139

the age of 4, my biological aunt and uncle adopted my sister and I, making me the middle child between their daughter, my cousin Ceanti, and my sister, Aurielle. I now refer to my aunt and uncle as mom and dad and my cousin as my sister. For years, I had abandonment issues, often assuming that one fight would lead to us being shuffled around again. I even tried to intervene with my sisters; I was often the peacekeeper and always wanted everyone to coexist in peace. Thankfully, my parents' bond was strong, and my mom and dad have been married for over 20 years and have created a wonderful loving foundation for my sisters and me. We have a typical sister relationship; we argue, we laugh, we steal each other's clothes but we also love hard, too. When we were first adopted, we were behind in school because we didn't have the appropriate structure or responsible parenting that ensured that we attended school regularly. I remember a particular time that my mom helped me with homework when I was visibly and audibly upset.

I sat at the kitchen table, looking at the words on the page. My feet were dangling, unable to reach the floor. Attempting to sound out every syllable, exhausted because I was still at the table and my sisters had gone on to play, I flopped my body forward on the table loudly so that my mom could hear me giving up on my homework.

I groaned, "I cannn't do this! It's toooo hard." Still with my face down on the table.

My mom turned to see me defeated, but continued doing the dishes. She used yellow rubber gloves to do the dishes so she wouldn't mess up her freshly manicured nails. She was always so classy and well dressed. "You can do it, Yara, sound it out. What sound does this make?"

"Um… I don't remember," I was feeling defeated and my eyes became full of tears.

Sensing the crack in my voice, Mama turned to face me, "Look at me, Yara. I know you're tired, but we're almost done and you can do it! You're so smart and…"

"No, I'm not," I protested, cutting her off in my angry 7-year-old voice.

Mama took her yellow gloves off and walked over and sat at the table gesturing to my homework. "Look at this, look at all of these questions you answered."

"But you helped me," I whined.

"So, you did that with your brain because you're smart," she said, smiling at me. I loved mama's smile, because it always made me happy. I began to look at the paper and saw that I had done the majority of my homework and I was almost finished. I took a deep breath and hugged my mama and finished my homework.

I remember working for long hours after school on assignments because it just took me a long time to get caught up with other kids my age. My parents always affirmed my sisters and me, letting us know that we were beautiful, loved, and smart. They reinforced positivity, which breathed life into us and taught us to affirm ourselves. That support helped me persist and believe in myself academically, especially when I struggled in school or in something else.

We lived fairly close to my biological mother in elementary school, but, as the crime rate in the area rose and the neighborhoods got worse, we eventually moved to a more suburban area of Missouri. It was a complete culture shock because I left a predominantly Black school where I was one of many Black students to go to a predominantly White school where I was one of the few Black students. Initially, it seemed as if so many people wanted to be my friend, but it felt insincere, as if I was this novelty, and if they were friends with me, then they could say, "Hey I have a Black friend." I never fully felt comfortable at my new school.

When I walked into school with my sisters, I was happy and comfortable knowing I had them to lean on. As soon as I stepped into my classroom, I felt lonely instantly. I looked around

for a friend, but I seemed to be the only Black girl in my class. My teacher introduced me to everyone.

"Class, we have a new student, Yara. Please be nice and table B, make space for Yara." As I sat down a girl reached over to hug me.

"Hi, I'm Lauren."

No one else at my table said anything and they barely smiled. All I could think was none of them followed directions very well because this was not what nice looked like. At lunch, I sat with Lauren and we began eating and then many people came over to talk to us.

"Hi new girl, what's your name?" asked the first girl.

"I'm Yara," I said shyly.

"Hi Yara, that's a funny name," stated the second girl.

"I like your hair, can I touch it?" asked the third girl.

"Do you want to be our friend?" the first girl asked.

"Um, I guess." Feeling overwhelmed at all the questions, I figured agreeing to be their friend would make them stop or leave.

"Okay, cool we don't have many brown girls at our school," said the second girl.

I sat with Lauren and the other girls at lunch most days, but I always felt like they wanted something from me. They always had questions about my hair and why I used barrettes or had braids. Although we were young, it always felt like people only wanted to be my friend because I was African-American. I didn't really know what to make of it at that age but I also sensed that something was off in school. They never did or say anything bad, but I never thought they were genuine.

Outside of school, I had basketball. I excelled at basketball. I played point guard and, although I was short, I was able to assert my authority and lead my team. I really enjoyed basketball because it came fairly easy to me and I was gaining confidence. Unlike school, I didn't have to work as hard to be equal to my peers. I had the desire to go pretty far in basketball, but once I began playing in junior high, my confidence began to diminish and I started thinking other people deserved to be there more than I did and my playing suffered because of my attitude. Thinking back on it now, I wish I would have pursued it further because I believe I could potentially still be playing, regardless of my small stature; I was really a dynamic player. Additionally, I know it would have been a huge opportunity for me to gain leadership skills and confidence. Nevertheless, I was much more comfortable in my middle school years in general, which helped me transition to high school.

Upon entering high school, I was selected to participate in an animal science college preparatory program that offered us mentorship and the opportunity to travel to different college campuses. The program was called 24th Century and my advisor, Mr. Villanueva, was awesome. He really gave me the autonomy to make decisions and lead my peers. Many of them came to me for help, advice, and just to talk. I could tell they observed my relationship with our advisor and how easy it was for me to talk to him and they followed my example.

"Hey, Mr. Villanueva, how's it going?" I asked him when I arrived in class. Other students were in class already and I walked to my desk to take out my materials.

"Oh just fine, Yara. Are you ready for this next college trip?" He asked to see my facial expression. We were headed to Mizzou and he knew it was my top school, and he also knew I was ready.

"Sure am! I said enthusiastically. "I think I'm going to really like Mizzou."

In a more serious tone, he warned, "Well, keep your options open, we'll be attending a lot of schools this year."

"Oh I will, but I'm just really excited about Mizzou."

Mr. Villanueva nodded okay as he left the room with a folder in his hands. "I'll be right back," he announced.

Tyrese came around to the front of my desk looking puzzled.

"How do you do that?"

Confused, I asked, "What do you mean?"

"Just talk to Mr. Villanueva, I mean he's our teacher," he said, as if I should've known what he meant by his voice inflection.

"I don't know, he's like our mentor," I shrugged.

"I know but… It's hard for me to talk to adults," Tyrese said, shaking his head at the thought of the interaction.

"Well I think Mr. Villanueva is pretty chill, so it's not so bad," I said calmly.

"Yea I guess, but you're like a leader, too, so it comes easy for you," Tyrese said with admiration.

"If you say so, we're in the same program, so that must make you a leader, too," I told him, attempting to pay back the compliment.

Tyrese went back to his seat and Mr. Villanueva eventually came back to class. After that day, I helped facilitate more times for Tyrese to speak if we worked together on projects or assignments to get him comfortable speaking to Mr. Villanueva. By the end of the semester, he seemed much more comfortable with asking questions of Mr. Villanueva and other teachers. Through the 24th Century program, I was exposed to Dunder Mifflin University in high school.

It wasn't my first choice university, but I was offered a unique funding opportunity that would cover my first year if I participated in a summer transition program.

My freshman year transition was full of unforeseen obstacles. Although I had the summer program, which helped me adjust to college, I still felt like an awkward turtle. I didn't really know where to go or where to fit. Thankfully, I met people through the summer transition program or else I would've been completely lost. Unfortunately, the summer program did not guard me from being homesick. I went home almost every weekend and even seriously contemplated transferring closer to home. Once I really thought about it, the scholarship I was receiving at Dunder Mifflin was worth the homesickness, and I hadn't given DMU an honest chance either. I decided to give DMU college life a real chance and get involved. I joined a Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc., a historically Black sorority, as well as really buckled down in my major, which led me to transition into business. I realized that although I loved animals, it was not my passion, and I really wanted to work with computers and information systems.

Figure 4.5. Yara's Self Identity Art

Figure 4.5. Yara's depiction of her identity development as a student leader at DMU.

The greatest leadership experience I gained during that transition was in my sorority because our chapter was so small. I had to hold multiple roles that required a ton of communication and leadership skills. I also had to collaborate with the overarching board for the other Black Greek letter organizations on campus, which required presenting a unified front for the Black community on campus. While I was thriving in leadership, the spaces I existed within were still predominantly white, which meant racism and, in some cases, sexism was present. As a Black woman, I have to always be aware of both because sometimes my treatment includes both types of discrimination. I have been yelled at in high school and in the DMU community to go back to Africa more times than I'd like to count. Usually when it happens, I just ignore it and move forward because it isn't worth my time to devote energy to such blatant hate and racism. Within my classes at DMU I am reminded daily that I am both Black and a woman because I am in a male-dominated major and there aren't very many Black people in my classes either.

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I had the opportunity to intern with a group of students from DMU in the summer between my sophomore and junior years, and when we returned in the fall for classes, we had a few courses together. We were about halfway through the semester and had established our routines; I was sitting with the group I worked with from the summer. I thought we had established great rapport. We joked and although we didn't hang out outside of class, I didn't think they had anything against me, just that we were more of an acquaintance. I was late to class one day and noticed the seat I usually sat in was taken by another girl who hadn't been sitting with us all semester. I thought it was odd, but I figured maybe she was just talking and she would eventually move. I figured I would go over and eventually she would move when they saw I had arrived. I was slightly nervous because I didn't want to cause a scene, but I also

<div align="center">146</div>

didn't want to have to work with another group after we had already started on projects. Our professor was typically in and out of class and we were left to self-facilitate, so I didn't expect to get much support from him. I approached them from behind because the entrance was at the back of the room and everyone sat in a semi-circle facing the front of class.

"Hey, guys, how's it going?" I asked smiling but making sure not to overdo it.

"Pretty good, Yara," Jake responded, who was someone that I had classes with the last two semesters and we typically sat across at the same table. He shifted in his seat when he saw me approaching and made minimal eye contact when he talked to me.

"Um, so where is my seat?" I laughed to lighten the mood.

"Well you were late," said Jake, "and, uh, we didn't know if you were coming."

"But I've been sitting here all semester," I said, trying to remain calm.

Attempting to make it right, Amber spoke up, "Well, we didn't know if you were coming." That did not make things right, especially when she repeated what Jake said.

"Um, okay, well I'll just pull up a chair," I said looking for a chair to drag over.

"Oh, but we're full now. Samantha is going to work with us today," Jake spoke again, apparently he was the group leader, but other than today he never said more than 10 words to me. I'm sure I was visibly annoyed.

"But we already established groups for the projects," I snapped, finally losing my patience and folding my arms in protest.

"I bet the professor will let us change it," Amber spoke up. And here I thought she was a peacekeeper, but she felt more like an agitator.

The other people in the group either continued to talk or looked away. The only people actually engaging with me were Amber and Jake. I realized then that although they knew me

and we worked together for almost a year now, they didn't care about me or where I was sitting in class. I shook my head, and I walked away from that group, defeated and disappointed. We had spent so much time together, and I hoped that one of them would've had my back, but then again I'm not surprised by it either.

Figure 4.6. Yara's Business Class.

Figure 4.6. Yara took this picture when describing her daily experiences as a Black woman in the College of Business.

I'm typically one of two or three Black students, but usually always the only Black woman in class. Outside of class, I have a few Black friends, but most of my core group is not Black, which I'm fine with because my friends are like my family and they support and accept me regardless of race or ethnicity. The people I would consider a part of my village are there to tell me I'm worthy and that I belong. In some ways, they stepped in where my parents left off when I came to DMU. However, white peers outside of my core group are somewhat indifferent to me. I don't feel welcome and included on this campus most days, which is really sad, considering the "family" motto they often advertise. I even sometimes feel as if I am intimidating my white peers in different spaces, although I am only 5'1" and 125 pounds, soaking wet. I have maneuvered myself to sit in different places in an effort to not make my White peers uncomfortable (an example is depicted in Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7. A DMU Basketball Game

Figure 4.7. Yara's s seat choices at a sporting event as described in the passage above.

Once, at this particular college sporting event, I chose not to sit on a row with white people, although space was available, because I didn't want to make them uncomfortable. I just sat behind them, by myself instead. I suffer from imposter syndrome and too often, I wonder if I'm good enough to be here and whether or not I'll be successful. However, I am grateful to my people that love me and I am grateful for my own resilience. I have learned the hard way that it takes me longer to learn and I have to do homework multiple times and not everything comes easy to me, but that my education is worth working hard for. I have learned that I am a good leader and I have power over my life and decisions. Most importantly, I have learned that I deserve to be here. Through all my challenges, I think I finally know that I want to be in charge of my own life and that means self-authoring my destiny. Upon graduation, I want to be able to work for a large corporation and eventually save enough money to start my own photography business. I want my 13-year-old self to be proud of the woman I've become and to know I didn't hold back from my potential.

Looking back, I have many experiences of being the only or one of the few Black people in white spaces. Somewhere along the way, I learned how to be me, even if I felt challenged, isolated, and lonely. I think DMU, despite all its challenges, pushed me to work hard for my

passion, and I now feel confident in my career choice, and I don't question whether I belong in that field, even when I have bad days. It is as if I am no longer afraid of rejection because I know that I can work through all of it, even if it takes me multiple times, and longer than most. The awkward turtle will get to the finish line.

Aja

When I first met Aja, she was smiling from ear to ear, was bubbly, and was so cheerful that it was infectious. Aja is about 5'6" and brown-skinned, in her early 20s. She has natural hair that she wore in a puff, which was so impressive, that I just had to ask for tips. When I completed her first interview, I knew I made the right choice to add her to the group because she complimented the other participants' narratives but also brought a new perspective. Below, I share a reconstructed coming of age narrative for Aja, which like the other narratives, is also co-constructed in Aja's first person voice, with excerpts from interviews, without too much editing or correction.

She believed she could, so she did. If I had to describe myself in one word, I would say influential. Not in a way that most think about because of fame or power, but because I hold influence. Regardless of whether I want others to or not, I am being observed, studied, and people repeat what I say and do because they think it would work for them too as it does for me. I didn't always know I had this type of influence. I currently hold a position in Student Government and I have tangible influence on campus, but I don't know if I had this type of influence in elementary school necessarily. I knew I was always an advocate for those mistreated or for the underdog, and I stood up for what I believed was right. As long as I can recall, I defended those who were being disrespected and I really tried to act with love. One of my best friends in elementary school, Iesha, was in a wheelchair and people made fun of her, but

I always hung out with her and defended her because she was awesome and deserved to be treated nicely.

I was walking out of my first class watching my feet along the pale blue tile, consumed by my own thoughts, when Iesha told me to hop on the back of her wheelchair. She was already out of class because she was allowed to leave early to give her more time to get to her next class. I hesitated because I wasn't sure if she was supposed to have me or anyone on the back of her chair or if it would even carry both of us without breaking, but I hopped on anyway. I always wanted to experience riding on her wheelchair, but I didn't want to ask; but we were the best of friends so I figured if she didn't think it could hold us up, she wouldn't have suggested it.

"Come on, Aja! I promise it'll be fine. I do this with my little brother all the time."

"Well okay, lets go." I adjusted my backpack and stepped on the back of her wheelchair. We took off racing down the hallway, laughing and carrying on all the way to our next class.

That same day at lunch, a girl that I don't usually talk to approached me. I was busy eating when I heard her mousy voice. I think her name might have been April. She startled me and I immediately looked up and asked her to repeat her statement.

"Why do you hang out with her?" April said loudly.

"Her who?" I asked puzzled. I shifted my body towards her, now completely attentive.

"Well, Iesha," April leaned in and whispered. "I mean she's in a wheelchair."

"That doesn't matter. She is super cool and she lets me ride on her wheelchair and we have fun together."

"But she's in a wheelchair," April said, surprised.

"So, she's super smart and super fun. Have you ever even talked to her?" I asked confused by what her point was at this point.

"Well no, but…"

"Yea, I didn't think so. You shouldn't judge a book by the cover. She's so cool and way fun." I just went back to eating and ignored April.

April didn't have anything to say and she looked disappointed, but I wasn't sure if she was disappointed with herself or me. I didn't care to ask because it didn't matter. If she was disappointed with herself, then I hope she realized that all people are the same, and if she was disappointed with me, she shouldn't have been, and I certainly didn't want to get into it with her. So instead, she chose to walk away, which was better than continuing the conversation.

I'm not sure where or when I got the confidence to stand up for myself and with others, but I guess it's just how my parents raised me. I grew up with two parents who have been married for 27 years and an older brother and sister, both of whom are significantly older than me. My brother, Christian, got into a lot of trouble, but I know he's a good person, so I never thought of him as a delinquent or troublemaker. My sister, Kiara, was someone I always looked up to, but she was so much older than me so she never wanted to hang out with me. I enjoyed school because it was like an escape and my friends were there but it was also how I was introduced to cheerleading. I gained mentors and the opportunity to learn leadership skills through cheerleading. I was active in cheerleading through middle school and into high school. In high school I was able to join the varsity cheer squad as a sophomore, and I was co-captain of the team in my junior year and captain in my senior year.

I had several large learning moments as the cheer captain. The one I remember most involved twins on the team. For whatever reason, everyone on the team referred to them as twin 1 and twin 2. We were practicing for a regional competition and although my coach was present, she often gave me the autonomy as the captain to facilitate practice. We typically practiced in

the gym and this day was no different. We had our own space within the gym, equipped with bright blue tumbling mats and practice mats that also doubled as wrestling mats. We were on the corner of the mat having our pre practice meeting when I began discussing the changes for the upcoming competition while we warmed up.

"Okay everybody, lets get ready for practice and get warmed up. So this next routine we're going to transition a little differently. So Ashley, you'll need to move across the formation to the right and Twin 1 you'll need to move across to the left because…"

Before I could finish my statement, I had been cut off by Twin 1, "I don't want to do that, it doesn't make sense."

I responded slowly to calm my nerves with, "You're basically switching places with Ashley, why doesn't it make sense?"

Twin 1, snapped back, "Because it just doesn't."

Twin 2, joined in to support her sister. She had her hands on her hips and avoided direct eye contact, "I agree, it's kinda stupid." She definitely had an attitude.

I knew immediately something was off because the twins were typically fun and non-confrontational. I needed to address the problem right then, so I asked them to step outside the gym with me. "Ladies keep stretching, can you guys come outside with me real quick?" We walked across the gym to the double exit doors, and I wasn't sure what to expect from the conversation I was about to have, but I was prepared for anything. "So I feel like something is going on, you two don't usually act like this," I said calmly and openly. I had my arms down because I wanted to show them with my body language that I was open to their problems.

Twin 1 sucked her teeth as if she wasn't buying my sincerity, "We're tired of being called Twin 1 and Twin 2."

Twin 2 spoke up but less aggressively, "Yea, we want to be called by our names, Chloe and Kendra."

Surprised, I smiled and said, "That's it? That's why y'all have an attitude? How long have you guys felt this way?"

In unison they said, "I don't know, a while now," Twin 1, now visibly softening, looked up to meet my eyes and said, "At first it wasn't so bad, but now it seems like we aren't even individuals."

Relieved, I said, "I'm glad we talked, we can definitely do that and I'm sorry it took so long for us to start calling you by your names." I was genuinely happy that we had come to an understanding.

Chloe said, "Its cool. And your idea wasn't dumb or confusing. I was just mad."

"Alright cool." We were about to end our sidebar chat. "Well Chloe and Kendra, let's head back inside and reintroduce you to your teammates."

As we walked back into the gym, I could tell everyone was nervous about what just happened. I knew I had to have command in the room and put them at ease. I stood at the head of the mat to make an announcement. "Okay listen up guys. Kendra and Chloe would like to be called Kendra and Chloe from now on. No more Twin 1 & Twin 2."

Ashley yelled from the mat, "Welcome to the team, Kendra and Chloe!" Everyone cheered and clapped and we had a successful practice that day.

Although it hadn't crossed my mind that they would be upset, when I actually thought about it, it made complete sense and was much more respectful to call them by their names. It was my first memory of enacting leadership, but it was also right around the time a janitor at my high school told me I had influence and to use it carefully. It was the first time someone told me

that, but it definitely was not the last. It is an event that I often think back on when I'm faced with a hard leadership decision. It helps me remember the power I possess.

The confidence I gained from cheerleading in high school gave me the courage to audition for the DMU cheerleading team. I went early to try out and unfortunately I did not make the team, but the cheer coach told me to come back the following year, so I kept that at the forefront of my mind and paid attention to the cheerleaders in my freshman year. It did not deter me from attending DMU because I was going to study agricultural science and it was one of the best schools in the country for that program. My freshman year was lackluster. I worked the football games and I envied the cheerleaders, but I decided I would take the cheer coach's advice and when the time came, I would try out again. I attended different organizational meetings, but no one was very welcoming, and I didn't know how much more of DMU I could take after my first semester. I had a low grade point average, I was homesick, and just not happy. I seriously considered transferring to a HBCU in North Carolina.

I was talking with my friend Omni about my choice to transfer to North Carolina A&T. Omni was one of my friends who lived in my dorm. I often hung out with her and just talked about whatever. We were sitting in my dorm room watching television when I decided to tell her that I was transferring.

"So I decided this place isn't for me. I mean everything is so bland and I just can't," I said, as if I was just talking about an everyday topic like when we were going to eat dinner today.

"What? Are you sure?" Omni perked up, facing me, with wrinkled forehead, like she was confused.

"Yea, I think I'd have a better experience at an HBCU," I continued to watch TV.

155

"Ugh, but I won't be there. You should stay, I hope you stay," she leaned over to touch my shoulder and waited for me to look at her. Her voice had changed from shock to sincerity. Omni was one of my few friends at DMU, but she was genuine and definitely a great friend to have during my less than an awesome first year.

I applied and was accepted to North Carolina A&T and had sent my transcripts but decided at the last minute I needed to stick it out at DMU and give it another chance. When I made my decision to stay, I knew I had to go tell Omni. When we got together to watch TV like we did on Sundays I told her.

"Hey, girl, how's it going?" I said, as she was getting settled in her usual spot to watch TV.

"Great, what's up with you?" She replied, not sitting at the foot of my bed, but facing me.

I was fidgeting with my pillow, looking down. "Well not much, I decided I'm going to give DMU a real chance and I'm going to stay." I looked up as I was finishing my confession to see how she would react.

"Eek! Really? Thank God!" she exclaimed, lifting both hands in the air. "I prayed that you would stay," she confessed.

I sucked my teeth and perked up. "You did what? No wonder I had a change of heart. Here I am thinking that I decided on my own and you were praying for me this whole time?"

"You can't be mad. This is the place God needs you to be at," Omni shrugged.

"Yea I guess so, but still," I shrugged too, admitting defeat. We went on to watch our television show, and we continued this tradition because we had similar interests. As we got busier, it was nice to reconnect. She was also like the anchor that kept me sane heading into the following semester.

Thankfully, my experience did get better; academically my grade point average improved. Socially, I got involved with organizations in my major and outside of my major. Of course with my homesickness gone, I became more aware of what was happening in and out of class. In class, most of my peers were white and I was spoken to like I couldn't understand the material taught by our professors. I had a number of classes that required a lab, which also required a lab partner. In most of my classes, I was the only Black person in the class, so I was always paired with one of my white peers. This particular day, I was joined by a reluctant partner that questioned or second-guessed everything I did. In one particular class involving dissecting small animals, I had an issue with my classmates. We were split up in class and left to begin working on our assignment.

"Tater, I guess we'll be working together," I said to break the ice.

"Yea, guess so," Tater grunted reluctantly.

"So let's get started. I was looking at the tools before you came and I see we're missing the dissection knife." I tried to keep the mood light and non-confrontational.

Tater rolled his eyes and snapped at me, "What are you talking about? We have one right here." He was pointing down at the table.

Calmly, I corrected him, making eye contact, but still smiling, "No, that's for the larger animals, we need something smaller." As soon as I finished my statement, he was looking to ask someone else to back him up, solidifying that he wasn't listening to me in the lab.

"Hey Cyndi, can we borrow the dissection knife when you get finished?" He asked this other girl in class.

Cyndi, looking confused said, "Um, everyone should have one. Tater, do you guys have this one?" Cyndi held up the same large animal knife that Tater thought we needed to use.

Tater was about to speak, but I began before he could. Confidently and calmly, I said, "I've been in class as long as the two of you, I know which knife will be best used for dissection. Tater?"

"Well I guess we can wait, but if we get a bad grade it's on you," Tater said.

In an attempt to end the conversation, I made a suggestion while maintaining direct eye contact, "Let's read the instructions shall we? Step 1: You will need the following tools: gloves, goggles, SMALL dissection knife. Hmm it looks like we'll need that knife after all," I said sarcastically. "I'll go get one from the wash pile and clean it."

I decided to walk away to give Tater and myself time to cool off. Thankfully, we were able to work just fine that day, but that type of microaggression happened in various settings. The mistreatment I received from my peers wasn't always as blatant, but it definitely existed. Laughing when I responded to questions as if I were crazy, ignoring me, or speaking over me in class were regular occurrences. Unfortunately, the racism was not limited to in-class interactions.

The most significant personal racial incident outside of class was the discovery that my roommate from freshman year was a racist. After President Obama was re-elected in 2012, she was overheard calling him the N-word and saying that Black people always got what they wanted. I was walking back to my dorm room when another Black girl that lived on my hall approached me shaking her head. I didn't think anything of it because I hadn't been in the hall all day, and she was naturally animated.

"GURL! Did you hear what Jessica said?" my friend exclaimed. I couldn't really read her facial expression so I just listened to what was coming next.

"Jessica who?" I asked wanting to make sure I had as much information as possible.

"Girl, your roommate Jessica?" I immediately had to pause because I didn't really know what to think of my roommate. Earlier, she had made shady comments but never towards me, so I wasn't really concerned with her as long as she left me alone.

"So, apparently after President Obama won the re-election, she stormed out mumbling under her breath all mad and whatnot. Then she went upstairs and called somebody and was like I can't believe he won, fucking Niggers always get what they want and they're taking over our country. Girl I didn't hear her, but I heard that's what she said."

Shocked, hurt, and just caught off guard, I replied out of anger, wanting to take immediate action, "Are you serious? I don't want to live with her if that's what she really thinks."

With a deep sigh, my friend replied, "Girl I don't blame you, whatchu gon do?"

"I'm gonna ask her if she said it first, and then I'm gonna report her if she did, and get me a new roommate, too."

I immediately left that conversation and headed back to my dorm room. When I arrived there, I saw her sitting on her bed, and I couldn't wait to talk to her. "Um… hey Jessica…," I said hesitantly, while letting the last syllable of her name stretch out into the air.

"Oh hey, Aja," she said like she usually did.

"So, I was talking to a few of the girls and they told me that you were on the phone calling President Obama the N word and saying Black people always get what they want. Like what's up with that?" I didn't want to beat around the bush, so I asked exactly what I wanted to know.

She immediately sat up on her bed, her back against the gray cinder block wall, looking puzzled but also caught. "Who told you that? I didn't say that at all. I mean I was mad, but I didn't say that."

"Well, why would they lie about it?" I said, still standing in an effort to assert power over her and because I just didn't want to sit down.

"I don't know, but I only said that Black people get what they want," she said, now fidgeting with her fingers.

"Mmm. I'm going to go stay across the hall tonight," I replied, not believing a word she said, but also knowing that I didn't want to be around her tonight or ever again, if I could help it. I immediately went to my RA and requested a transfer, citing the racist remarks. I knew my roommate was lying to me and I couldn't live with a racist and a liar. I was eventually able to move out within a week. I continued to see her from time to time, but I never spoke to her once we were done being roommates.

My sophomore year was better. I made the cheer squad, and I was also involved in the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences, or MANRRS. I cheered again in my junior year and stopped in my senior year, so that I could get experience in my field and open up myself to other opportunities. I decided to run for MANRRS vice president and was elected. I also got involved with the general agricultural student council, which led me to become involved in student government. My experience with student government inspired me to run and be elected as the multicultural student representative for the student governing association. I wasn't sure what to expect as the multicultural student representative, but I was open to the challenge. I was excited to be a voice for the multicultural community on campus. The multicultural representative position has been eye opening because I expected to have more

support from my Black peers, but that hasn't been the case. I shouldn't have been surprised because I was never really welcomed into the Black community on campus, but I hoped that they would provide support since I was in this position.

Prior to deciding to run for the multicultural representative position, I contacted the current multicultural representative and she was nice until she discovered I wanted to run for her position, which she apparently wanted to do for a second year. We met once and after that, I didn't hear back from her; and when I won, she was not very helpful with my transition. To make matters worse, she was also dating one of the leaders in the largest Black student organization on campus, and because of that, I never felt like I was fully supported by that organization either.

However, I have had support by a few Black peers like a fellow Black woman leader texted me to encourage me out of nowhere to tell me she noticed what I was doing and to keep up the good work. I have a few Black staff mentors on campus who can calm me down and support me when I'm frustrated or just need advice. Through my leadership endeavors on campus, I often felt that I need to take a step back and reflect on whether I was too "bitchy" or loud or stereotypical. As a chocolate brown, Black woman with kinky hair, I know some people are uncomfortable with me sitting across the table from them making decisions, but I've learned not to care because I know I belong at the table. As I've grown in my leadership experience on this campus, I realize that I need to be more authentic to myself, regardless of if I come off loud or snappy.

Figure 4.8. A Day in the Life of Aja.

Figure 4.8. This portrait was taken in Aja's favorite place on campus. She spoke about entering the whole in the sculpture and feeling renewed afterwards.

I decided that is who I am and people will have to learn to adjust to me. I also discovered the power I have as a woman. I'm well aware of the lack of rights women have, but the power to choose to reproduce with someone and to carry children is immense. As a Black woman, we create nations, and that is also powerful. I didn't think about the power I had or even know I really had power until I realized that I had the power to create life and carry children. As a Black woman, I have that same power, but also individually, I have the influence to make great change because I know I can. I created a vision board for my life because I want to make sure I am reaching my goals while I help others reach their own. I decided to create a vision board so that I would start embracing who I am. So I have quotes like, "get respect," "twenties," "you are a queen," "isolated beauty." I just want to remind myself I am my own beauty, I am queen, and I can control how people treat me. I have my Bible because Jesus keeps me sane, and my cheer bow, because I didn't realize how big of a deal it was to be one of four Black DMU cheerleaders. So I just like to look at this board and am reminded I am a queen.

Figure 4.9. Aja's Vision Board

*Figure 4.*9. Vision Board and Artifacts representing Ajas life to include her goals for herself (vision board) and her cheerleading bow, Bible, and inspirational plaques.

I love that Black Girl Magic is a thing now because I feel like we are magical. We make things happen and we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors. I think when Black women work together, magic truly does happen and that's why I choose to be me, unapologetically, because I know that I have the power to influence those around me, especially future generations of Black women.

Thinking back, I have always been confident about my opinions. I was completely questioning everything when I had that bad year at DMU. But when I committed to DMU, it was as if I stepped into my power fully, and it did not matter if someone was being racist, sexist, or both, I knew how to stand up for myself and say, "Not today." I stopped worrying about how I would come across, and continued to hold my position and keep a broader goal of service in mind. Whatever way I was a leader with influence before, I think I have expanded that circle of influence much more now, and I have done it by fully believing in my inner power and being authentic about it.

Discussion

All four participants experienced challenges throughout their educational paths and in pursuits of leadership, as explained in their narratives. This discussion serves as a cross-case comparison highlighting similarities and differences in the participants' experiences as well as key issues. The cross-case comparison and the key issues are also informed by the research purpose, questions, and theoretical frameworks of this study. The four areas include understanding intersectionality, navigating educational environments, leadership development, and overcoming obstacles. Understanding intersectionality focuses on how the participants authored themselves in terms of being Black and a woman and being a Black woman. These are not categories they can simply walk away from, as they are visible reminders of how people might read the participants as well as how they might author themselves. Navigating educational experiences highlights the participants' journeys that allowed them to understand who they were in an educational context, how they navigated cultural stereotypes, and how their experiences supported their choices in leadership. Leadership development is a key area of focus because it directly explains the need for counternarratives centering Black women and girls in educational settings. Overcoming obstacles was a common experience for all the participants. Therefore, this area of focus includes the support system from which the participants drew strength if they felt challenged or were in crisis, and the experience of overcoming obstacles allowed for a sense of confidence and the critical need for self-care.

Understanding Intersectionality

As discussed in Chapter 3, the participants were not familiar with the academic terminology I used, so I needed to explain certain terms. Those explained included microaggressions, the use of woman vs. female, the use of Black vs. African-American, and

intersectionality. Due to their lack of understanding of the discourse of intersectionality specifically, I often had to probe further when asking questions about their intersectional identities. Of the four participants, two could describe their Black womanhood, especially the implications and experiences of them as Black women. The other two participants had fewer examples or no examples of their Black womanhood. All of them had experienced some type of racial identity trigger growing up and, because of this triggering event, they were conditioned to understand what racism looked and felt like for them. However, the same trigger had not happened for them as Black women. The trigger for their understanding of womanhood mostly resided within the biological realm of their experiences, starting with their menstruation cycles. Later, most of them understood their experiences as any cisgendered woman would understand sexism, except perhaps Aja, who attended to her role as both a woman and a Black woman in a predominantly male-dominated field.

Aja alluded to not wanting to be perceived as bitchy or snappy within leadership settings. She described being overly reflexive about her behavior in certain student government association meetings. She explained being the only Black woman in the meetings and she did not want to perpetuate any stereotypes by raising her voice or responding out of haste to comments she found unfavorable. She said she attempted to interact throughout the year holding her tongue and or ignoring comments in an effort to not be perceived negatively. She realized that suppressing her emotions was not allowing her to be her authentic self. Although Aja never used the term intersectionality, many of her experiences included the effects of sexism and racism acting simultaneously. The very fact that she was aware of the race- and gender-based stereotypes and attempted to neutralize them or not step into trappings, to the point where she

suppressed her own ways of being, demonstrated her navigation through her intersectional identities while experiencing various types racialized and gendered microaggression.

When asked about Aja's understanding of womanhood independent from race, she discussed the power and perceived privilege of motherhood. She also took a spiritual approach to womanhood, expressing the impact women have when it comes to choosing a partner and starting a family. Overall, Aja understood womanhood and even mentioned ideas that align with Black Feminist Thought, but some of her description of Black womanhood was centered on different biological changes focusing on motherhood unlike the other participants who focused on their menstrual cycles.

Janelle's understanding of intersectionality was much different than Aja's. Janelle explained her experiences as a Black student leader, but rarely mentioned any ways in which she was treated as a Black woman. She was the vice president of BVU and the president of the organization was a man. I asked her if she was treated differently than him. She shared a story about potential collaborators emailing them both, but being more direct with him. Janelle said people often approached her with caution and sometimes would email them the same topic, but with different emails as if they did not communicate. Even though there may have been gendered or racialize microaggression in Janelle's experiences, she mostly tuned into the racialized aspects of the microaggression while not really attending to what it meant for her to be a woman beyond biological characteristics, and rarely ever spoke of being a Black woman.

Issa discussed her Black identity as a point of pride but, unlike Janelle, Issa was aware of her womanhood. I contribute her understanding of womanhood to her woman-dominated field of education. She was consistently acting in her womanhood among classmates, especially when she stated, "I'm Black and I'm a woman;" but when discussing her experiences with the women

in the class, she continued to realize that she was the only Black woman in class. However, this may also be because of her woman-dominated field that she might have had very little to compare her experiences in the context of an absent or minimally present masculinity. Thus, what stood out to her was being Othered amongst the white women in her classes because of her ethnic identity.

Yara was aware of her intersectional identity, but similar to her peers, she was unable to articulate when she realized her intersectionality and how that realization came about. I was surprised to see that none of the participants could draw from their experiences a clear example of intersectionality as it has been defined for this study. However, when recalling my own experiences at their age, I realized I might not have articulated an intersectional understanding of identity either.

The absence of identifying specifically with an intersectional Black women identity perhaps revealed the saliency of how these Black women were primarily navigating their worlds as Black people, while drawing a sense of support and solidarity of sisterhood from other Black women on campus and in their families. It is not that they did not understand they were Black, or women, or even Black women, but it reveals how intensely they might have had to deal with racism where it became their primarily self-authoring lens.

Understanding Blackness

All the participants described an event or incident that awakened their understanding of Blackness. Janelle described her realization of being Black much younger in elementary school. While completing identifying documents for her class, her teacher told her not to mark Black or African-American on her form. Her teacher would come around and tell her what to select instead, an offensive term that was unfamiliar to Janelle. Janelle knew she was Black prior to

167

her teacher telling her to check mulatto, so it caused her to question her Blackness because an adult told her something that did not align with her personal truth. After hearing the story, I asked Janelle if she was aware of what mulatto was at that point in her life. After she replied no, I asked if she knew what it meant now and she did. Establishing that she understood that term, I then asked her how she felt after her mother confronted the teacher and she learned about the term. She told me at first she was embarrassed by her mother, but quickly realized that she would be treated differently and her Blackness would be questioned due to her light, brown skin. This revelation did not worry Janelle, but influenced her to research her family members, and she learned that many of her elders and ancestors were fair skinned. This knowledge put her at ease and better prepared her for the potential ramifications she would receive as a light-skinned Black person. Her light skin has been at the center of her teasing from other Black people and has also been perceived as a privilege by other Black people. Being in the middle of this tension, Janelle was still able to persevere and, when possible, educated people around her about the damage of their teasing or marginalization.

None of the participants discussed the shade of their skin being a permanent hindrance per se, but they certainly were made aware of their difference early on in their lives. Such awareness allowed an understanding of Blackness to emerge, and this understanding soon became complex as Janelle understood her Blackness in the context of being perceived as biracial. Aja understood Blackness wherein not all Black people were in solidarity with her and she even had to deal with a racist roommate that made her realize what she would and would not tolerate as part of her being Black. Issa's understanding of Blackness was driven by her past and present experiences and her aspirations for the future of other Black children. Being often the only Black person in her professional spaces, Issa became more convinced that it was critically

168

important that children should encounter at least one Black educator by the time they graduate high school. This was driven by her own experiences in which she wanted children to embrace and not suppress their Blackness as she felt she had to do growing up. Yara's understanding of her Blackness emerged when she became the Other in a predominantly white school after being in a predominantly Black school. She became increasingly sensitive to whether or not she was the token Black friend of some of her peers and was distrustful of their sincerity. Later at DMU, she experienced blatant racism where people told her to go back to Africa while driving by her. So while her identity was not a hindrance in the sense that it did not stop Yara from pursuing what she wanted, she still had to work with and through various racialized experiences to navigate her experiences in higher education.

Unlike the other participants, Aja always remembered being Black. She grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood and attended predominantly Black schools. Therefore, the first time she experienced a large number of white people was at DMU during cheerleading tryouts prior to her first semester. She anticipated being the only Black person in a sea of white people, so it did not bother her until she came on campus in her freshman year and was not embraced the way she thought she would be by her Black peers or really anyone. Additionally, she was involved with a multicultural student organization within her major, but she often felt like her peers in class misunderstood her because of her Black identity. Aja shared several examples of feeling lonely and isolated as the only Black person in her major, but her early awareness of her Blackness made her more prone to understanding discrimination when it happened.

Being Black was the strongest point of self-authoring for all of the participants. They learned very early on either through positive or negative experiences about being Black. Once

the participants were in predominantly White educational spaces, they began to understand their differences and the micro and macro levels of aggression they would have to navigate daily. Each person's understanding of Blackness varied and also had similarities with each other. For example, Aja expected a strong solidarity with other Black leaders on campus, and yet she was also comfortable being best friends with a white woman, while she was critically self-aware of her Blackness, influence, and leadership skills. Unlike Aja, Issa struggled with expressing her Blackness and often practiced self-censoring, whereas Yara was more of a loner and did not seek out Black sisterhood to understand her Blackness. Janelle was a strong code switcher who could move between Black and white spaces effortlessly, perhaps because of her long experience of having to do so earlier on in her life. Overall, all the participants experienced pride in being Black and did not articulate Blackness as a hindrance. This was especially rewarding to witness because despite dominant discourses of deficit, the participants did not author themselves in such a manner. Instead, each one of them became confident and self-assured in her Blackness and wanted to engage in some reciprocal relationship with other Black people whether it be their peers, students, or members of the Black community in a service role.

Understanding Womanhood

Feminism is a complex and multipronged field leading to various understandings of how oppression occurs across various axes of differences, including, but not limited to, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and racial/ethnic identity. Thus, it was not a surprise that the four participants, while similar in many ways, authored themselves differently, too. For example, all participants spoke about the ability to use their voice, power, or influence as Black women leaders as needed. However, they had mixed feelings about respectability politics and the policing of women's hair, and or bodies. Issa was strong in her conviction that she should

170

not be judged on anything other than her character or her teaching ability if she is in the classroom. For Issa, what she was wearing should be entirely irrelevant. Aja and Yara both agreed that as long as a person feels comfortable in what they wear and how they decorate their bodies, they should be able to do so without any disciplining or policing or shaming. Janelle, on the other hand, considered outfits that cannot be worn in church to be inappropriate for professional spaces, too.

Yet most of the partcipants' understanding of womanhood was ill-developed or developed through a mainstream narrative of a biological gendered identity. The participants at times thought my asking about womanhood was odd or weird and had to think of whether or not they even considered themselves a woman versus a girl. Aja, Janelle, and Issa identified their womanhood with a biological marker of when they first started to menstruate or when a woman could become a mother. However, Aja understood womanhood and, more specifically Black womanhood, as the power to create life. She saw womanhood as a symbol of strength but used motherhood as the marker for that strength. Yara often referred to Black womanhood as powerful. Although she recognized injustices women face, she also noted the privilege of being a double minority and what advantages that may have given her in a white male-dominated field, like business, where even when she was tokenized, she was still very much sought after for opportunities. The lack of examples surrounding womanhood but the predominance of examples surrounding racism created some key insights for me. One insight was Black women are preconditioned to align their opinions and understanding with their race primarily and with their gender secondarily. This could also be seen through a patriarchal lens where Black women's interests as women were not made front and center while growing up.

Thus, even though tenets of Black Feminist Theory (BFT) influenced me to honor the authored narratives the participants shared, I began to see these narratives more so through the lens of Critical Race Theory at times and less through BFT based on how the participants responded. Had the participants actively discussed their Black womanhood, then a reflection through BFT would have been appropriate. Instead, every single participant discussed a strong connection with maternal figures in their lives and that they drew strength from such connections. Therefore, for the participants, womanhood as they understood from wherever they were in their journeys of self-authoring, was always celebratory, supportive, and consistently present in their lives.   This was not an area of struggle for any of them, and therefore, it was not an area to which they could speak in much detail other than having very superficial and obvious biological markers of womanhood.

Navigating Educational Experiences

Elementary Education

As discussed in the literature review, Black girls are met with obstacles while moving through K-12 education due to a variety of circumstances. One of the largest issues is the overpolicing and mistreatment of Black girls in K-12 school systems (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). The participants all had different stories pertaining to their academic experiences prior to college, but a trend was that all of them described themselves as confused or *bad* in school as adolescents, specifically in middle school. Janelle explained that one of her middle school teachers would make her complete the teacher's college homework because she distracted her classmates by talking. I inquired if she recalled anyone else being forced to do work that was not a part of the curriculum and she could not recall any such time. This was a small incident that explains the complex environment in which Black girls must navigate in order to persist in

education. Black girls experience challenges in various ways; Janelle was not challenged to meet her potential and Yara had extremely difficult circumstances leading her to fall behind and continue to struggle.

Yara had a particularly troubling early childhood experience, which included poverty and absentee parenting. She and her sister were adopted by her aunt and uncle at a young age and were able to receive resources to help them improve their education. However, Yara disclosed that due to her absentee parenting, she missed school, which caused future academic difficulties for her. Although, her circumstances contributed to her falling behind in school, it is an example of the power of education to either support or hinder one's progress as an individual.

A barrier to college and education in general for Black girls and women is the lack of representation of Black girls and women in the field of education. Issa was majoring in teacher education and managed to be an enthusiastic graduating senior without ever having a Black teacher. When I asked her why she persisted in teaching, she simply stated, "I always knew I was supposed to be a teacher." In addition to the overpolicing of Black girls coupled with the potential for lack of preparedness for education like Yara, most Black girls are then met with an absence of Black women as role models, teachers, and leaders in schools. Such absence reinforces a narrative that excludes Black women as educators or educational administrators. Within an elementary school setting, the only person who mentioned receiving mentorship from a Black teacher was Janelle. Aja discussed being motivated by her teachers because they knew she could do the work but there was not a bond created between the teachers and her for her to feel inspired by her teachers. Overall, the elementary education experiences of each participant created a foundation for their expectations of secondary education. Fortunately, mistrust was not established, but there was an expectation of predominantly white educators and administrators.

The Road to College

The participants' experiences in secondary education included their understanding of themselves as young women and, for most, it was when they began to solidify developing a strong leadership identity. Although they were in various leadership roles before going back to early childhood experiences in church for Issa. Participants recalled more leadership-oriented discussions from their experiences in high school than from earlier parts of their lives, unless it was a striking memory. This could also be due to either a loss of memory and or a lack of experience to draw from. Participants also experienced support from a variety of sources upon entering their secondary education careers to include mentorship from teachers, pre-college programs, and college networking opportunities.

Janelle entered a middle school that introduced primarily minority and underrepresented students to college. Each student in her school was required to attend different courses to support essay writing, ACT and SAT courses, and general life skills courses that would support their college experiences. The completion of academic requirements made her eligible for a scholarship that included full tuition and expenses for room and board. Janelle attributed her preparedness for college to all of the pre-college experiences that qualified her for the Wesley Scholarship. She also mentioned pursuing a college education was the popular and assumed route for most of her peers, which reinforced the importance of college while simultaneously making it *cool* to her and her classmates. The culture in Janelle's high school made students feel that college was an expectation and attainable. The students were celebrated for receiving scholarship letters and college acceptance letters. The Wesley Scholarship Program was unique because it did not end until Janelle graduated from college, so the mindset of graduating from college was also prevalent since she was a tween.

Issa did not have a choice about attending college. Her mother required that she attend college; thus, she followed in her mother's footsteps and applied to her mother's alma mater. She did not have a strong college preparatory foundation but registered for a new student orientation/first-year program for diverse students. The program served as a place for her to develop as a leader and foster community amongst her peers. Although she had a sense of community, she decided after attending a regional conference on Black student government to transfer to DMU in her second year. She chose to transfer because she felt a larger university would provide her with more opportunities and she would gain a greater sense of Black pride similar to what she experienced at the conference she attended. Once she transferred to DMU, she was able to join Black Voices United (BVU) and was involved in a variety of committees and activities within BVU, which kept her focused and helped her maintain a high grade point average.

Yara saw college as her opportunity to break away from her somewhat strict parents but also as a means to improve her life. She was first exposed to DMU through the college preparatory program through her STEM class. She recalled the class was an introductory to college class, but there was also a partnership between DMU and her school, making it an ideal choice. She was undecided between DMU and another university, but the partnership provided financial support through a program called MAPS. The MAPS program was a high school to college transitional summer bridge style program, which provided tutoring, first-year preparedness, mentorship, and community. Yara eventually transitioned away from the MAPS program because she chose to pursue a degree in business, but the community she gained within MAPs remained a part of her DMU network.

Aja had a different situation than the other participants. She did not have much of a community or network of people during her first year and her grades suffered. She even considered transferring because of her difficult first-year transition experience. She was not engaged and assumed that student organizations and people would recruit her to be involved. She hoped to join the cheerleading squad upon entering DMU but did not make the team. However, she was encouraged to return and try out again the following year. Her first year was not ideal, but she chose to find a staff mentor.

All the participants crystallized their leadership identity while they attended college. Most of the participants shared experiences from their childhood that provided glimpses of who they would become as leaders in their future. Except for Janelle, all the participants' earlier educational experiences were in predominantly White spaces, leading them to realize their difference that could create marginalized experiences. Yet, despite the hidden and overt obstacles in the educational system, all participants were expected to attend college, whether it was through a school culture or through their home culture, if not both. These experiences highlight a counternarrative of Black girls and Black families with not only stories about celebration and support, but also stories about brilliance, creativity, and leadership amongst Black girls and women.

Leadership Development

The use of the Leadership Identity Development Model (LIDM) has proven to be a useful tool in understanding the development and growth of each participant as a leader. I tried to map the participants' experiences to the various stages of LIDM to understand the implications, limitations, and possibilities of such mapping. Recall the stages within the LIDM as listed below.

Stage 1 - Awareness: The student's current level of understanding about leadership generally.
Stage 2 - Exploration/Engagement: The student's desire to seek out new opportunities for involvement.
Stage 3 - Leader Identified: The student is clearly identified as a leader in a role or position.
Stage 4 - Leadership Differentiated: The student begins to differentiate between leaders with titles and leaders who took action.
Stage 5 - Generativity: The student now cares about his/her commitments and the betterment of others.
Stage 6 - Integration/Synthesis: The student is confident in their group as a leader.
 (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005, pp. 396-397)

The stages have a linear development arc that implies one cannot get to Stage 6 without moving through the other earlier stages. In other words, the implication is that a student cannot be confident as a leader of her group in a way she would be if she attained a developmental experience moving from having an interest in leadership, seeking experiences to align with such an interest, being in a leadership role, differentiating between dreamers and doers, and having a sense of service to a group about whom they care. Although there are not stories to adequately establish when each of the participants progressed to each stage, there is enough evidence in the participants' narratives and the positions they held at the time of this study to consider them in relation to the Leadership Identity Development Model. I discuss this relationship between narratives shared and the stages of the model below.

 Childhood Leadership

Looking at the first stage of Leadership Identity Development Model, it seems the participants entered this stage at different parts of their lives where they had some sort of awareness about leadership. At Stage 1, someone, typically a parent, guardian, role model, or an adult authority figure, appoints or assigns a potential leader a task. In many cases, the task could be small but the appointment from an authoritative figure embeds the idea of leadership in the future leader. For example, Issa discussed working at her church and being required to record

church service. When she questioned the decision of her elders, they emphasized her leadership skills, which in turn helped build her leadership efficacy. Proponents of LIDM would argue that such an experience moved Issa towards developing her identity in Stage 2. Janelle, Aja, and Yara experienced their Stage 1 leadership awareness through sports. For Janelle, it was basketball, and for Yara and Aja, it was cheerleading. By the end of elementary school, all the participants had some awareness of leadership and were in a prime position to move into their Stage 2 leadership identity.

In Stage 2, students seek out new opportunities for being involved. Except for Yara, all the participants discussed some form of leadership-seeking experiences in middle school, which then prepared them to be in an identified leadership role later in high school, as is expected of one who moves to Stage 3. Janelle continued to cheer but had been appointed cheer captain, which is a clearly identified role of a leader. Additionally, she added basketball co-captain to her leadership role. Issa continued to be involved with her church, taking on larger roles and serving as a role model to her peers. Yara no longer played basketball but she was heavily involved in academic pursuits like a pre-college program, entitled 24th Century. She was able to network with her peers and her advisor, which may not have been a clearly identified leadership role, but she certainly moved into much more visible roles of being a leader to her peers and was considered as such by them, which would place her beyond Stage 2 in the LIDM. Aja also continued to cheer and became the cheer captain early on in high school. Similarly to Yara's, Aja's cheerleading experience taught her the value of group collaboration, which is a key element in the transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4, where one could differentiate between a leader and someone who has a title of a leader. In this stage, one would understand the value of invested actions versus someone who holds the title of a leader. One could argue that Yara was

already moving between Stage 3 and 4 where she was focusing on leadership as something that is tangible in action and continued to stay on that path through the rest of her educational experiences. Please note that not all the participants had an exact incident for each stage, but their thinking dictates their progression through or skipping of certain stage(s). The following section addresses each participant's leadership journeys as adults as they relate to the LIDM.

Adult Leadership

One of the selection criteria for this study was that the participants would have to at least be in a clearly identified leadership role/position, i.e. what Stage 3 describes. Upon entering college, Janelle and Aja were heavily involved in multiple student organizations as student leaders. Yara was involved with one organization formally and she was an informal leader among her peers within her major and as a student intern, much like what she did in her earlier years. Issa was in a major that required her to enter her field a semester early for the student teaching, so she had direct influence and leadership within her field as well as informally on her job. All the participants spoke about leading from their positionalities and understanding their Blackness and the influence and responsibility they had to the Black community on campus. Although one of the criteria for selection for the study was to be a leader in an organization, the understanding of leadership across all participants aligned with the understanding of leadership in Stage 4, which is a sense of discernment between leadership actions and leadership titles. An example of this thinking is in Janelle's commitment to leadership, describing herself as hard working and "down for her peers" in BVU. She did many things that were not written in her vice president job description, but she engaged in actions that promoted her understanding of her sense of duty and calling to support the Black students on campus.

By the end of data collection and analysis, it became clear that all participants have found their way to some aspect of leadership identity as described in Stage 6, the final stage of Leadership Identity Development Model (LIDM), where they transferred their leadership skills to everyday experiences and other generative leadership commitments. For example, Yara's experience as a summer intern and Issa's experience as a student teacher were examples of such identity development. Yara naturally lead in professional settings to show a future employer how she was at ease with leading and also to be in service of her colleagues. Issa often used her leadership skills to manage her classroom and communicate effectively with her supervisors in an effort to be respected and not misunderstood. Aja and Janelle were able to use their advanced leadership skills to provide leadership across multiple student organizations and within their classroom interactions. These generative ways of engaging in leadership are characteristics described of a leader in Stage 6 of her identity development. The intergration and synthesis aspects of Stage 6 in LIDM focus on a leader who could use her leadership skills in multiple spaces, disciplines, and contexts, understanding that leadership skills are transferable; and when one feels self-assured and confident in one's leadership skills, then it would not matter where one is, one would emerge as a leader naturally.

While it can be argued the participants moved somewhat linearly from Stage 1 to Stage 6 of the Leadership Identity Development Model, I was unable to determine strong indicators for certain stages. It seemed at times some stages might have been skipped. Additionally, I would argue that to work effectively in Stage 6, across other disciplines and contexts, a leader would often undergo the earlier stages simultaneously or episodically, or even linearly, in a much quicker time than their initial leadership identity development experiences. In other words, if a leader is put in an unfamiliar situation, the leader might still need to cultivate conditions for

180

being a leader, for understanding what actions would be appropriately differentiated as the actions of a leader, and how they could be generative in their new context of leadership. Also, because it was difficult to determine with certainty whether a participant's experience was genuinely what proponents of the LIDM model would identify as development across all of the stages, it would be erroneous to consider this discussion as anything concrete and universally applicable. Instead, it is my interpretation of the participants' experiences through the LIDM.

Finally, because certain stages were less salient in the participants' narratives, I was compelled to conclude that either the participant did not share certain narratives or consider them relevant to share, and or the participant might have skipped a particular stage. However, the Leadership Identity Development Model seems to have no mention of gender, race, or intersectionality and how such positionality would contribute to one's development of their leadership identity. It seems that even though the model was satisfactory in describing a more generic process of identity development, it homogenized all student leaders to a large extent without any mention of how race, gender, or intersectionality might contribute/hinder one's leadership identity development.

Overcoming Obstacles

Figure 5.1. Overcoming Obstacles

Figure 5.1. Issa took this photograph as a depiction of the roadblocks she faces as a Black woman student leader at PWI.

Barriers in College

Each participant experienced college differently but all of them faced obstacles in their first year. Some of their issues could be attributed to being in a predominantly White space that created feelings of isolation and loneliness. Other issues the participants overcame included their lack of time management and study skills and homesickness, which are common for people transitioning into college regardless of ethnic background. Funnily enough, Issa explained that her love of naps was detrimental to her success because she missed classes and her grades reflected her bad habits. Janelle realized she needed to ask for help because her first semester did not go well academically. Asking for help also meant that one would have to know who to ask for help, and in the case of the participants, that such help would not be racially microaggressive and they could really trust the person, group, to whom they were looking for support.

Aja was unhappy in her first year because she was not on the cheerleading team, and her grades suffered due to her lack of investment in DMU. Yara did poorly in the first semester, but she was so homesick that she traveled home on the weekends and did not connect with the university community or any groups until her second semester. The slow start did not hinder either of the participants' graduation or leadership development process. Some of the success of the participants could be attributed to the strong work ethic they developed while growing up where either their parent(s) or their teachers would expect them to attend college and graduate. At the time of the study, each of the participants was successfully matriculating through college and graduation bound.

Community and Familial Support

> It takes a village to raise a child.
> – African Proverb

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to highlight the people and places both physical and symbolic that aided in the participants' matriculation through education and into college, as part of their support system. At least two of the participants discussed their college preparatory or first-year programming experiences that eventually assisted them in their academic success in college. Additionally, all the participants described the role of mentors to include, family, faculty, staff, and peers at DMU, contributing to their successful navigation of formal and informal academic spaces.

Each participant attended DMU through varied experiences and pathways. Janelle was raised by a single mother, alongside her older sister. She had a relationship with her father occasionally, but her relatives from her paternal side of the family were intimately involved during her upbringing. Her memories of her familial support system included maternal and paternal grandparents, her paternal aunt, and her mother. Despite her father's absence, Janelle

described a good childhood, one that involved the understanding of hard work at an early age. Similar, Issa, alongside her little brother, was raised by a single mother. Her father was inattentive for the majority of her childhood but she had support from her grandparents and her church family. Therefore, what is understood as family varied in Issa's case because it extended far beyond her biological family. Yara was born into a tumultuous situation, which led to her adoption along with her sister's at the age of three by her aunt and uncle, whom she eventually referred to as her parents. She and her sisters had a supportive, loving environment that became her foundation for education, especially when she struggled catching up in school. Yara learned she was capable of working through any obstacles even if it took her a bit longer than others and even if she might have to attempt to some complete assignments multiple times. Eventually, she became comfortable with her self-described awkward turtle persona. Aja was raised by both of her parents, but her older brother and sister were so much older than her that she felt like an only child. Although she discussed being lonely at times, she described her upbringing as a happy one. Each participant started with their family as their primary support system. However, all of them had teachers, community members, and friends that aided in their academic and personal persistence and success.

A strong community foundation can be instrumental to the success of Black women students persisting through education. The participants had varied experiences with their *village* that lifted them up, and yet there was a core *village* that was part of their support system from their childhood. Janelle discussed that her grandparents filled in for her mother in her early childhood because her mother had an inconsistent work schedule. Later, when we established stronger trust and rapport, Janelle disclosed that her mother was in a serious car accident when one of her teachers offered to allow Janelle to temporarily live with her when she was a child. In

an effort to make Janelle as comfortable as possible and to provide a modicum of normalcy, her teacher, Mrs. Parker also drove her to all of her extracurricular activities and treated her as if Janelle was her own child. Janelle spoke about Mrs. Parker being one of the inspirations for joining her sorority, as Mrs. Parker told her she would benefit from the sisterhood and the community. Even though Janelle's mother was a source of strong support, so was Mrs. Parker and her grandparents. Janelle learned she was able to count on her community if there was ever a crisis in her life. It is quite extraordinary for a teacher to take care of Janelle in a way that she did.

Issa recalled her earliest source of support came from being in church. She was introduced to her church by her grandfather Charles and step-grandma Robyn. Charles and Robyn served multiple roles in Issa's life, to include driving her school bus and the church bus (Charles) and being her church mentor (Robyn). Additionally, her church also represented the small population of Black people in the town in which Issa grew up. Her mother and father moved to Kansas when Issa was younger than three years old. When her parents divorced, they stayed in Kansas, although her mother's family was primarily from Louisiana. Issa learned that her support system did not have to be limited to her parents and that she has an extended and expansive family to call on for support as and when she needed.

Yara's sense of support from her community came from different sources. Similar to the other participants, Yara had a strong home and a strong bond with her sisters. As the middle child, she was often the peacekeeper and diplomat among her sisters, often wanting everyone to coexist in peace. Her village existed within the confines of school and sports. Many of her role models outside of her house were her coaches, teachers, and one specific teacher, Mr. Villauneva. Mr. Villauneva selected her for a STEM program and was able to foster her

leadership skills and hone her confidence in STEM fields. Additionally, the mentoring she received from participating in the college preparatory program led her to opportunities and scholarships that enabled her to attend DMU. So for Yara, in addition to her support from home (where she was already playing a leadership role at an young age by being the peacekeeper), a huge part of her support came from her coaches, teachers, and others connected to her in her academic world.

Each participant identified clearly where their support system lied, on whom they could count, and how their *village* helped them navigate difficult situations. Additionally, each participant had a support system that extended beyond her mother and father to include extended family, grandparents, and even people who were not related to them. Support came from churches, school, and even from specific teachers and coaches. Therefore, given that participants learned generative forms of community support beyond their immediate family, their desire to become leaders who support communities in a generative way seemed a natural consequence.

Self-Confidence and Self-Care

A response I received that could have potentially been changed with more probing or reframing of questions is that my participants just *did*; they learned and experienced by doing. In many ways they did not know what to expect or how to navigate leadership, college, or even K-12 education, but they *did* because that is how they were taught. For example, Aja told me she knew she was going to college. She did not know how, she just knew she had to do it. She saw her mother work, raise children, and attend college, and had to figure out where she would go. When I asked Issa why she wanted to be a teacher after learning she had never had a Black or Black woman teacher, she said she knew she was supposed to be a teacher, and that is something

she just did and had to do. Her teaching philosophy included being a face for students of color who aspired to be a teacher. Janelle just knew she had to work hard, she just did, and she hoped others would see her as a hard worker and be inspired. Yara saw college as a way to break away from her strict parents but their belief in her allowed her to take the steps to apply and move away for college. As each participant gained self-confidence in their ability to lead, it was imperative they all discovered ways to keep themselves healthy, while they did work that could leave them physically, emotionally, and spiritually drained. Establishing an effective self-care routine was a way each participant articulated their ability to do the work.

I asked all the participants explicitly what they did for self-care. In accordance with self-valuation, I found self-care is often lacking among Black women; therefore, it was necessary to discuss within the research. I realized that for them to continue to serve others and encourage themselves, self-care practice was a necessity. Aja discussed spending time with her dogs, eating good food, and exercising as ways she practiced self-care. She attributed a healthy body to a healthy mind. She also realized she was often so busy she needed to schedule personal rest days for herself. Yara loved animals and loved petting dogs for self-care. Issa slept and watched television for self-care; she attributed her ability to juggle multiple commitments and a high grade point average to the amount of sleep she was able to maintain throughout college. Lastly, Janelle meditated as a part of her self-care routine. She discussed the difficulties in meditating when she first began but later found meditation calming and relaxing. I was thoroughly impressed to see that all of them had an effective self-care routine that was personalized for each of their unique needs.

Overall, self-confidence helped propel each woman to the leaders I met at the beginning of the study. Each woman had a unique story, but the one thread I repeatedly saw was self-

confidence. All of them addressed insecurities, but they also discussed the ways they used self-care to reinforce their self-worth and self-efficacy.

Each participant was met with a variety of obstacles while matriculating through the American education system. In addition to navigating institutionalized racism in the education system, they were also simultaneously constructing their racialized and gendered identity. Although Janelle and Yara were the only two participants to share fond relationships with teachers, all the participants were able to use outside support systems like family, church family, and other community support to help them persist. Thus, each of the women was able to gain the confidence to propel them to college, although they were aware of the ways in which they could be treated as an Other in a Predominantly White institution. Understanding the importance of support, each of the participants eventually found organizations, faculty, staff, and or peers to provide the community necessary for their individual success. While serving others, each of the women recognized the importance of individual self-care and developed routines to align with their needs. The next section is the conclusion for Chapter 4.

Chapter Summary

I began this chapter with the narratives of each participant to provide context and understanding of their lives as Black women student leaders. Each narrative is a linear first-person retelling of the participants' stories as I have interpreted them and then verified with the participant. I compared the narratives across four themes, which were understanding intersectionality, navigating educational environments, leadership development, and overcoming obstacles. I informed the discussion with the research purpose, questions, and theoretical frameworks. In the next chapter, I offer the conclusion and implications of this study.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion and Implications

The experiences of Black women student leaders has been explored in multiple ways, but few studies have examined the ways in which Black women have matriculated through education and specifically in Predominantly White institutions and spaces using critical Black Feminist Thought. For this study, I used my positionality as a former undergraduate student leader representing a predominantly White space to inform this study. I have written this chapter in a scholarly and personal voice in alignment with Black Feminist Thought. Black Feminist Thought allows me to write the final portion of this chapter in first person to demonstrate self-authorship as a Black woman. Thus, in the final portion of this chapter, I offer an homage to Black women situated in various professions that I think are owed respect and acknowledgment.

Recall the purpose of the study and research questions as stated below. These reminders serve as an anchor for the information presented in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of three to four Black collegiate women leaders in higher education in their third and fourth years of study in a Predominantly White Midwestern institution. Research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do the participants describe their experiences as both a Black person and a woman in their formal and informal educational contexts?

2. How do the participants discuss the ways in which they navigate(d) challenging situations in their experiences as Black women as undergraduate student leaders in a PWI?

3. What do the participants identify as support systems that help them navigate their challenges?

4. How do the participants describe developing their identities as student leaders as a result of their experiences?

In this chapter, I answer the research questions and discuss the contributions of this study to the existing disciplinary literature. In addition to offering homage to other Black women, I conclude the chapter with potential future studies that could be conducted as a continuation of this work.

Research Questions Unpacked

I answer the research questions here collectively instead of individually because the answer to one question often has overlapping answers to another question. This should be seen as a result of conducting rich, entangled, and intersected research of lived experiences of Black women student leaders where easy, clean, delineated responses would limit the complexity in which the participants live and make sense of their lives. To unpack the research questions, the following topics are discussed: the participants' ability to apply self-authorship to their respective identities, their individual understanding of their racialized and gendered identities, seeking community, finding community, navigating challenges, support systems, and lastly, their individual leadership development at the intersection of race and gender.

As I began recruiting participants for this study, I discussed with each of them their experiences on campus and asked them about their racial and gender identity specifically. To participate in this study, each participant was required to identify as a woman and a Black person. Once I asked the question, they were somewhat caught off guard, but I wanted to align my selection with Black Feminist Thought (BFT), which requires self-authoring. This meant the participants would identify themselves through gendered and racialized perspectives. However, the participants' racialized experiences took precedence over their gendered experiences; they still identified as a woman, but mostly from a cisgendered perspective. I realized then that we shared different understandings of BFT and their self-authoring was different from how I might

author myself. This could also be because I have been more exposed to BFT than the participants and I did not think it would be congruent to BFT to impose my notion of self-authoring on the participants. Indeed, there is no monolithic Black woman culture; therefore, I honored whichever way they understood their womanhood, even if it was more racialized than gendered.

Through the interviews, it was further reinforced that the participants' experiences in education created the context for them to think of race as their primary identity and gender as their secondary identity. Therefore, they often described themselves as Black leaders on campus and spoke from a Black viewpoint, with the innate understanding of the fact that such viewpoint is already emerging from the perspectives of a Black woman. The importance of highlighting ways in which they identified solidified my use of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) because they understood themselves in a racialized way that I was not expecting. However, BFT provides space for self-valuation regardless of how one understands her identity. In other words, BFT aligned with the participants' experiences because they self-identified as Black women. Three of the participants were in sororities, and I anticipated learning about Black womanhood and sisterhood within those contexts, but the participants primarily addressed sisterhood and even at times equated sisterhood with their identity as women and to some extent as Black women.

For the purposes of this study, participants understood sisterhood to include the bonding, collaborating, and having a support system with other women within predominantly Black women groups or activities. In contrast, the participants understood womanhood as being aware of their femininity and understanding themselves as an individual. The participants saw their identities tied up in their experiences of sisterhood and understood those experiences to be valuable when they occurred within Black sororities. However, they did not separate sisterhood

from Black womanhood, as for them it was just one entangled aspect of their identity. The entanglement, for the most part, demonstrated a state of becoming aware of a Black woman identity through sisterhood, where the participants could not separate sisterhood from Black womanhood, so much so that the participants often spoke of conditions that cultivated sisterhood in their sororities as their primary ways of self-authoring.

Participants also contrasted their self-authoring through sisterhood in Black sororities with the lack of sisterhood they experienced within K-12 education. This lack of sisterhood became the reason why the participants wanted to be part of a community as a college student. All the participants expected that when they entered college, they would be invited into various communities to experience a sense of belongingness, as they would otherwise not know what might be a welcoming community. There is an inherent tension here in their need to belong and their reservations in seeking out a community of belongingness. The need to expect an invitation into the folds of different communities was also grounded in the need to feel valued as a contributing member of that community.

Yet, with a lack of invitation to different college communities, three participants eventually sought out membership in Black sororities. These participants continued to develop an identity that was fiercely grounded in being proud to be Black; therefore, if there was any gendered marginalization from Black fraternities, they were unwilling to discuss or reveal them. In fact, I had no sense of how they related to the Black fraternities beyond a superficial response denoting all was well without any further details. This silence made me question whether they actually had a strong positive relationship or whether they chose to overlook any tensions or gendered experiences in favor of dealing with racism on a predominantly White campus.

Aja was the only participant who was not in a sorority and she seemed like she was searching for sisterhood among Black women. Aja discussed her feeling of loneliness and isolation within her disiciplinary major as the only Black woman, but she seldom discussed her role as a woman in informal and formal educational contexts. She was a cheerleader and cheered with other Black women at DMU but she did not consider them long-lasting friends. This indicated to me the complexity and the multiplicity of Black womenhood and sisterhood. It was not a given that if Aja were around some Black women that she would automatically find community and sisterhood with these women. Therefore, the fact that Black womanhood is not a monolithic concept became evident in Aja's feelings of isolation. Any assumptions made about how Black women can feel a sense of belongingness would need to include the fact that feelings of belongingness are not just limited to being around people of the same cultural group. That would automatically prompt that all Black women would find friendship, sisterhood, and community with each other, rendering an erroneous homogenous quality to Black womenhood.

Yara and Aja discussed wanting community at DMU and finding it hard to connect with people on campus. Both of them found that people on campus did not acknowledge them and sometimes rendered them invisible. Issa attended a conference on Black Student Government, and the experience of travelling from her small state school to DMU was the exposure and college experience she desired. Janelle was connected to DMU via receiving the Wesley Scholarship, which offers tuition, housing fees, and books. The scholarship also provided her with mentors and a sense of community because those who recruited her were from her hometown community. Each participant wanted a different community experience at DMU and all of them somehow found themselves in some student leadership role. Their experiences as student leaders allowed them to become insiders of the community for which they were leaders.

Thus being insiders became a way for them to find a sense of the "DMU Family" that was advertised when they were recruited and also was the school's primary philosophy.

Unfortunately, the participants did not overtly declare what could be challenges they faced as Black student leaders at DMU. Yet they were continuously describing microaggressions, racism, and sexism through their lived experiences without labeling them as challenges. Perhaps they did not have the vocabulary or understanding of challenges as I conceptualized them through my work, or it was not as blatant an injustice and, therefore, they either ignored it or could not recognize it. In other words, perhaps their prior experience with challenges could have placed their understanding of challenges to be driven by such severe injustices that they could present formidable roadblocks to their survival. Thus, the challenges I might have considered to be relevant could appear to be of lesser consequence to the participants since they were able to successfully navigate those situations. This kind of normalization of oppression is something that Black Feminist Thought would highlight as an injustice. Basically, the continuous and daily lived experiences of oppression somehow renders us blind to these experiences because we have developed a capacity to either deal with such oppression or accept such oppression as a regular experience, or be desensitized to such oppression, all of which only reinforce the oppressor and the system of oppression to maintain such marginalization.

Yet this innate complacency and acceptance of difficult situations should not be normalized in higher education. Therefore, this kind of internal acceptance of oppression is problematic because it maintains the cultural norm of centering various social structures of dominance such as whiteness and patriarchy. Hence, these experiences point to a need for in-depth cultural competency training for all students, staff, faculty, and administrators regardless of their levels of education. The implementation of cultural competency requirements would

help alleviate the unjust acts as well as educate those lacking cultural competency and its importance. Further, injustices do not need to be severe for us to pay attention to them. Indeed such attitude would continuously promote various microlevel racial and gendered aggressions, which can have damaging consequences on people.

Each participant had a variety of support systems. All of them had parents and family who supported them from a distance, but gaining support at DMU was more difficult to attain. However, each of them also had roommates, sorority sisters, and peers from various organizations of which they were members to lean on for peer support. Each participant had a strong understanding of how support looked, felt, and could be enacted for and with them. For example, Yara discussed her parents' continued praises of her accomplishments and also that of her sisters. Having the consistent support from her parents allowed her to gain a self of confidence that shaped how she authored herself. Yara had a positive disposition about life and she attributed that to her parents' persistent support. All participants had strong Black women role models and supportive mothers, grandmothers, church mothers, and or sisters. Finding that kinship was more difficult at DMU, but all of them eventually found people either on campus or in the community to support them. Aja discussed having a staff mentor that helped her in early years at DMU, while Issa had a support system through her church home. Yara had a strong family foundation but then looked to her sorority sisters and friends for support at DMU. Janelle leaned on her sorority, BVU, and her faculty/staff advisors for support. All participants sought out or were approached by Black and or other marginalized faculty and staff for mentorship and support. Experiencing support from a variety of areas allowed them to begin to model that same support to other Black students who came after them. Ways in which they supported their peers outside of their respective organizations was an example of the fifth stage of the Leadership

Identity Development Model: generativity. Generativity is defined as the participants' care for the betterment of others. In other words, as the women gained leadership experience, they began to look outside of themselves and their organization and explore ways they could assist the larger Black population.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, all the participants jumped stages of progression as described in the Leadership Identity Development Model. Yara never expressed experiencing Stage 2: the student desires to seek out new opportunities. Yet each participant had to arrive at Stage 3 to hold a specific leadership role in order to be a participant in the study. The types of leadership in which each participant was involved varied. At the time of the study, Yara did not have as many experiences as a student leader in executive board positions, but she had informal leadership experience and influence among her peers within her major. Influence and action are identified in Stage 4: as a leader differentiated, the leader begins to differentiate between leaders with titles and leaders who took action. On the other hand, Janelle and Aja were heavily involved in leadership roles, often running for president or vice president of their respective organizations. They could have arguably been stagnant within Stage 3, but they discussed the ways in which they took action within the context of their organizations and outside of that context. Issa was informally leading as a student teacher at the time of the study. However, she remained involved with BVU, signing up for committees in an effort to stay connected but also to serve her community. Overall, the understanding among all participants remained that a leader was not a title but one who led by example and with action. In other words, each participant found ways to work for their community regardless of the position they held. They each understood that leading without action would not move them forward as leaders, nor would it move their community forward. More than their personal growth, each of the women discussed how their

actions and leadership impacted their organizational members, peers, and larger community. Ultimately, they knew a strong community created strong individuals, which was the goal. Thus in summary, the following offers a comprehensive response to the research questions posed in this study.

The four research questions address the understanding of each woman's lived experience as Black women undergraduate students leaders at a Predominantly White institution. Thus, exploring ways in which the K-12 education system informed their understanding of their racial and gender identity was necessary. Literature dictates the majority of Black girls will meet barriers in their educational pursuits; therefore, it was important to include ways in which each woman described navigating those barriers and what support systems, if any, helped them navigate education. Lastly, combining their learned experiences within education systems, the barriers encountered, and the support systems, which helped them matriculate, provided understanding surrounding the ways in which they developed into student leaders as Black women. When describing their experiences as both a Black person and woman within educational contexts, their racialized experience was so prominent that it created a dominant identity over a racialized and gendered identity. However, they are already at the intersection of both race and gender, but the way they are raced and the way they experience racism becomes more salient for them than any gendered experiences. In fact, if they were to be harassed on DMU, they would primarily think it is because they are Black, but not because they are Black women. Yet it is not that they forgot they were women. Rather, they drew their understanding of gendered identity from their maternal role models growing up and from the sisterhood they experienced with other Black women either in sororities or in other communities in which they belonged. Because of the racism or microaggression they experienced in both formal and

informal educational contexts, they were reluctant to share any kind of negative comments on gendered treatment from Black fraternities because their focus was always to be a proud Black student leader.

In contrast, when discussing problems as Black women student leaders, challenging situations were rarely identified by the participants even when they identified situations with intense microaggressions. It was as if the participants normalized various types of injustices and they built capacity to deal with such injustices they no longer saw as challenges but as situations they might be expected to encounter.

Although the participants did not name their challenges as such, they did identify support systems that helped them navigate those challenges. Overwhelmingly, their support looked Black, which included familial, community-based, on-campus, and peer support. Due to the normalcy of the challenges they encountered, each participant was met with guides in the form of supportive individuals who helped them navigate the higher education system. In many ways, their involvement in leadership roles was another way for each woman to persist and overcome challenges. As student leaders, they were instantly connected to a network of like-minded peers and advisors, both faculty and staff who were invested in their success and the success of the organization in which they were involved. Therefore, leadership provided them a space that fostered a culture of perseverance.

The combination of racial and gender identity development attributed to the leadership identity development of each participant because it allowed each woman to develop an understanding of themselves as individuals. Once each woman had an understanding of who they were as Black women and what that meant to them, they were able to embrace their roles as leaders. Each participant discussed a sense of understanding their Black identity as early as

elementary school and their gender identity shortly after they reached puberty. However, they would not have self-authored themselves as leaders until high school when they held leadership positions with tangible roles. Therefore, in the experience of each participant, it was imperative they had a basic understanding of their racial and gender identity prior to their leadership identity.

Theoretical Implications to Research

As addressed in Chapter 2, to explore and understand the experiences of Black women student leaders, I chose to use Black Feminist Thought (BFT), Critical Race Theory, and the Leadership Identity Development Model as theoretical lenses. BFT was used as the epistemological theory, which described how I understood the world as the researcher. I used BFT because I understood (and still do) the world as a Black Feminist, but also because I understood the study through an intersectional lens as a Black woman. The three themes that support BFT are self-definition/self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Afro-American women's culture (Collins, 1989).

The participants were proud of their Black womanhood in ways that they understood their authoring of that concept. Thus, it was their self-definition, their self-valuation, which did not need correction from me, even when I differed in my understanding of Black womanhood, but also highlighted the lack of any single notion of BFT. Therefore, allowing the self-authoring of the participants revealed that the burden of racism to them was so heavy that they were unwilling and or perhaps unable to articulate sexism from within Black or white communities, and that until they can feel racially equal, they are unwilling to look at gendered or intersectional inequities. It does not mean that gendered or intersectional inequities do not exist, just that the heaviness of racism eclipses everything else or brings these inequities in the fold of racism.

Womanhood was a source of sisterhood, community, belongingness, maternal connection, a celebratory space and experience for them, and never one that was folded into racialized and gendered intersectional experiences or gendered experiences of minoritization. Because of a strong Afro-American woman culture within which they were raised, they understood womanhood to be a source of strength and pride and never a space in which they were marginalized. The marginalized experiences (even if they were intersectional) were attributed to racism. Although I believed they should have had more salient ideas about their womanhood, I realized the times in which they grew up have been more racially energized, and as a Black woman, they have been expected to focus on their racial identity rather than their gender identity, which has not left space for them to digest the interlocking oppression of racism and sexism in their lives. Thus, it was important for me to use a critical Black Feminist lens to see how they were or were not describing intersectional oppression. However, within an educational context it was important to use Critical Race Theory because it explicitly addresses race and education.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses five tenets; however, I emphasized three within the research: the normalization of racism and permanence of it, counternarratives, and interest convergence. Conducting this work provides counternarratives to dominant narratives by dismantling ways in which Black women are defined within mainstream discourse. A few counternarratives provided through this study are Black women as leaders, Black women as successful, and Black women as educated. The discourse surrounding Black women has historically been negative and the stories told about the triumphs of Black people often exclude Black women's narratives. However, when these women become student leaders, they are breaking tradition and their narratives then become counternarratives. Therefore, it was

imperative for this research to counter those narratives with stories of educated, successful Black women leaders.

Another tenet of Critical Race Theory challenged is whiteness as normal and permanent. This tenet critiques infrastructure that promotes centering whiteness and white perspectives as normal and acultural. Three of the four participants had nothing but white teachers, K-12 and throughout undergrad, and few advisors were Black. Most Black people within the schools held low-paying jobs (cafeteria workers, janitors) and were not in any kind of mentoring or leadership role. This is a systemic inequity at the intersection of race, class, and gender. So this is also the reason why one would normally expect a Black worker with a white manager in various establishments, or even white leaders of institutions in urban centers such as schools and universities. Such division of presence programs people to know their place. One of them said she suppressed her Blackness until she joined Black Voices United and learned how to celebrate and embrace her Blackness. Therefore, whiteness is being reinforced as normal for those in mainstream and non-mainstream communities.

The ways in which interest convergence is explored is primarily through the education system. The university system is driven by student enrollment and recruitment of various types of students including students of backgrounds from various axes of difference. If they are successful in recruiting and retaining students who come from different backgrounds, then they can also use that success to attract more students. Thus, Black student leaders play a key role in being visible. They promote the goals of the university by having access to predominantly White spaces, while being present as a representative at the table for various decision-making moments. This type of interaction, access and comfortability displays the university as a friendly space for Black people; therefore, it can become a tool of recruitment and retention. Then it is interest

convergence because Black students have some access and privileges they did not have before. Additionally, they may have support systems that would help them succeed, they may even have some channels of grievances should they experience racism, and if the university is able to retain the students and have these students successfully graduate, then the university looks good and can use it to expand their profile and future student recruitment.

Leadership Identity Development Model

The participants' leadership identity development centered their racial and gender identity. The model, as described by Komives et al. (2006), uses a predominantly white sample group to explain and establish the leadership identity development model. Yet when applied to Black women, I found their racial and gender identity needed to be established prior to their leadership development. Further, as I began applying the Leadership Identity Development Model, the types of leadership activities in which they were involved centered Blackness primarily and Black womanhood secondary. Therefore, none of my participants were able to enter a space, even a predominantly Black woman space, as solely a leader; instead, they approached every space as a Black woman leader. In other words, while they achieved every stage on the Leadership Identity Development Model, they also had to navigate and develop as Black women while simultaneously developing leadership identity.

Overall, Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, and Leadership Identity Development Model all had significant theoretical implications on the research. Black Feminist Thought primarily led my understanding and thinking about analyzing and conducting research. Critical Race Theory had the most implications on the participants' educational experiences. Lastly, the Leadership Identity Development Model informed both my understanding of my experiences as an undergraduate student leader as well as the ways I structured the study. The

Leadership Identity Development Model, in combination with Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory, had direct implications on the importance of addressing intersectional identities and leadership.

Contributions to the Literature

Recall the literature that informed this study was divided into the following key areas: school-to-prison pipeline, the lack of Black women leaders in higher education, and institutionalized racism. The combined effect of the three ideas demonstrate the dominant understanding that paints Black students and Black girls as failing within educational contexts (Ladson-Billings, 2012) and that they are a generally untrainable and unemployable pool of Black women (Frankenburg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008) coupled with the historical racialized and gendered discrimination of Black girls and women within educational contexts (Tonneson, 2013). I discuss how this study contributes to the existing key areas in the literature. Specifically, this study challenges the dominant narratives about Black women and Black girls in predominantly White universities and how they negotiate their roles and Black women undergraduate student leaders. Further, this study contributes to the discussion about the invisible labor of Black collegiate women, their identity development, and the ways in which Black women's self-authorship manifests through the narratives provided.

The current understanding surrounding Black women and girls in education is primarily driven by a dominant deficit narrative (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). As discussed in Chapter 2, Black girls are overpoliced and kicked out of school six times higher than their white peers (African-American Policy Forum, 2015). Moreover, Black girls now find themselves punished, abused, and handcuffed in schools in ways that are clearly inappropriate and discriminatory (McLaughlin & Visser, 2015; Robertson, 2016). In fact, it has been a challenge to continuously

include incidences of ill-treatment of Black women while conducting this study, because the literature review continued to be an open-ended review, as I had to include more and more incidences of racialized abuse of Black women. These arguments, then, can be used to not only point out the discussion about the school-to-prison pipeline but to demonstrate that school has literally become prison for many Black girls. And yet, the participants in this study demonstrate the celebratory aspect of Black girls, who despite all the institutionalized micro- and macro-level challenges, still manage to complete their education and aspire to become leaders themselves as they enter university. The rich narratives provided by the participants challenge the dominant narratives about Black girls because they did not fail in their studies and they were certainly not untrainable and unemployable. In fact, some of them were strongly recruited into DMU. Their experiences of thriving despite their circumstances also demonstrate a counternarrative against the notion of Black women struggling in academic contexts. Indeed, there was overpolicing in schools for the participants and microaggression in the context of DMU; nevertheless, they persisted. These narratives then offer a culturally situated history that currently exists in scant proportions. Therefore, Black girls and women would be able to read this social history unfolding, draw strength from such narratives, and even could envision their own aspirational futures.

Narratives about Black women as undergraduate student leaders are also scant in the literature for various reasons. First, because of the school-to-prison and the school-as-prison pipelines, fewer Black women enter universities or even consider an educational environment one in which they belong. Second, those ho do enter universities struggle because of micro and macro levels of racialized (Banks, 2009) and gendered discrimination (Tonneson, 2013). Therefore, in addition to transitioning to being a college student, Black women in PWI have to

deal with additional barriers. Third, when such negotiations of additional barriers are conducted with success, where Black women become undergraduate student leaders, then those experiences and success should be celebrated; thus, this study offers such a contribution to the literature.

The exploration of leadership within undergraduate contexts has historically been limited to white students and few students of color whose identities are often written as a monolith (Komives et al., 2007). In other words, when leadership literature is produced about students of color or students with some type of difference other than being white, heterosexual, able-bodied, and cisgendered, they are written as "other" as if all of their experiences are the same. The depiction of listing all students of color as homogenous is dangerous because it erases their varying identities, experiences, and backgrounds. Specifically, for Black women student leaders, it is important to share this story exploring Black women's experiences alone and not in contrast to their Black male or white female counterparts, thus allowing a self-authorship without comparison. Hence, the experiences of the participants demonstrate the complexities of their experiences as they create a belongingness for themselves as Black undergraduate student leaders. What is a key contribution in this area is that the women in this study continued to discuss their role as Black women student leaders in terms of race more than in terms of gender. This highlighted how they perceived themselves in comparison to their white counterparts even when they were self-authoring their narratives. The burden of having to deal with racism, increase capacity for racist experiences, and attempt to neutralize their own feelings of being oppressed became a key contribution to the literature, based on the cultural context of the participants.

Some of the oppression of the participants occurred in the ways in which they were engaged in invisible labor. Thus, this study contributes to the literature by discussing the ways in

which Black women collegiate students negotiated their invisible labor in a PWI. For the purpose of this study, invisible labor could occur as physical, spiritual, and mental investment of energies. As student leaders, the job description for the participants was open-ended and allowed them to decide how much they would like to contribute to their communities. Participants engaged in calling peers to talk them through difficult situations, making sure their peers attended study hall, sitting with their peers in the front of class so they can be seen and can also attend to the instruction better, conducting mock interviews for career fairs, and much more. Additionally, the invisible work the participants described were also social justice related and could be translated to research. Examples include forums on the N-word, a forum with local police officers after the killing of multiple Black people, and demonstrations on behalf of the victims of police brutality like Michael Brown. Although many of these programs were organized through different student groups, the participants described these programs and efforts as obligations. They did not see such an obligation as something negative; instead, they were proud of taking ownership of their leadership role that created successful outcomes for their community. In other words, the participants genuinely were their sisters' and brothers' keepers and they took that role seriously. Within existing literature, the discussion about invisible labor of women faculty and staff of color exists (June, 2015); however, there is little discussion about the invisible labor of the Black women undergraduate student leaders, perhaps because this is such a unique position to be in due to racialized and gendered infrastructure of various power networks within formal and informal education that there might have been few opportunities to really study and work with this population.

Each of the participants discussed the labor in which they engage for Black and other underrepresented groups of people on DMU's campus and in the community. Issa discussed

wanting to be a teacher so she could give back to her community to be a mentor and a role model for students of color, especially Black students in her classroom. Yara discussed wanting to work with current students of color in her major to help them be successful and feel a sense of belongingness in a predominantly white male field. Aja chose to work as a diversity representative within the Student Government Association to be a positive voice for students of color, and Janelle used her voice as one of four Black scholars among a campus-wide elite leadership group as a platform to improve the experiences of Black students on campus. All of these experiences described above are unpaid and time-consuming commitments with various types of invisible labor. However, they insist on investing this invisible labor regardless of reciprocity or gratitude from the community in which they serve, as their need to help other people of color is so strong that such need directs how much invisible labor they want to invest. In addition to contributing to the literature about this population's investment in invisible labor, an area of inquiry can emerge if one would trace how the investment in invisible labor in college translates into the investment in invisible labor in Black women's professional lives later.

To explore the identity development of Black woman leaders, I combined the Leadership Identity Development Model and Black Feminist Thought to understand how these women developed and understood themselves at the intersection of their gender, racial, and leadership identity. Just using the Leadership Identity Development Model without integrating Black Feminist Thought would have been incomplete because it would eclipse the intersectionality of racialized and gendered experiences of the participants. In this study, as the women understood themselves racially, they were able to step into leadership roles within groups that aligned with their racialized identity. Such belongingness also allowed them to move back and forth between various stages of the Leadership Identity Development Model.

However, the combination of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Leadership Identity Development Model (LIDM) allowed me to note how strongly the participants responded to their racialized experiences instead of their gendered or intersectional experiences. For example, if a participant felt discriminated, she attributed such discrimination to being Black, instead of to being a Black woman. She then identified how she would navigate the challenging situation, the ways in which she would demonstrate her leadership skills amidst the challenges she was facing, and the way she would author herself as a Black student leader who happens to be a woman. This observation became consistently prevalent throughout all the participants' experiences, leading to the insight that the participants' self-authoring and leadership identity development were deeply connected to how they engaged with racism on campus. Even though the initial intent to use BFT and LIDM was to demonstrate the intersection of race, gender, and leadership, this study demonstrated that the burden of being racialized was so heavy that gendered discrimination or intersectional experiences of discrimination did not become the salient part of awareness the participants shared about their roles as Black women student leaders. Thus, this study demonstrated a stronger intersection between race and leadership identity development instead of an intersectional depiction of race, gender, and leadership identity.

While several studies utilize Black Feminist Thought for Black women's self-authoring purposes (Collins, 2000; Counts, 2012; Crenshaw, 1991), using narrative inquiry to describe the ways in which Black undergraduate women understand themselves is a contribution to the literature. Allowing the participants to tell their stories and their ideas about themselves was a way for me to collaborate with them as the researcher while also creating a space for them to speak their personal truths. Self-authoring provides Black women the opportunity to define

themselves for themselves, regardless of the white gaze that may exist or even my researcher gaze as a fellow Black woman.

In summary, the contributions to the literature included counternarratives about Black women collegiates that offer information about the experiences of Black women undergraduate student leaders, exploration of the invisible labor of Black collegiate women, and creation of a critical understanding of identity development of Black women leaders in predominantly White campuses while creating a narrative space for self-authoring. Perhaps the most critical areas of contribution to the literature are those where counternarratives were shared that demonstrated the value of Black women's and girls' inputs to formal and informal educational contexts and how such contributions need to become the disruption to the deficit narrative. Additionally, the participants' celebration of their womanhood through sisterhood and connection to their maternal role models demonstrated a move away from deficit narratives to one where the participants drew strength from and existed in solidarity with their relationships with other women. What was also striking was how strongly the participants continued to identify as a racialized Other instead of a racialized and gendered Other at a PWI. This indicated the violence of racism at a PWI that could not be mitigated with the support of the sisterhood and the communities within which the participants existed.

Future Studies

Many areas of future inquiry can be suggested. However, I am focusing the discussion on future studies by reflecting on areas of information that could have offered support to the students' experiences and the research literature informing this study. There is scant literature about the support the people like the participants in this study experience from faculty and senior level administrators. However, the advisor of Black Voices United and one of the Diversity

Coordinators of a college were both regarded as advocates for Black students and all students of color. A variety of areas could be further investigated to expand and deepen the findings of this study. Some of those areas are listed below:

- The intersectional development of undergraduate Black women

- Black women mother scholars in academia

- Black women graduate student identity development

- The intersectional development of Black women within a Greek letter organization

- Black women undergraduate student body presidents or vice presidents at PWIs

- Black women undergraduate lived experiences at HBCU/HSI/Tribal Colleges/Community Colleges/ Women's Colleges

Although I could use pieces of my study to influence the aforementioned potential studies, each of them would need additional data collection and different participant criteria to explore in depth. The exploration of graduate students could add value to the intersectional understanding of Black women within another population in higher education. Although my participants understood they were women, they could not well articulate when or how they knew they were women other than with biological markers and a celebration of sisterhood. In accordance with the literature, women who exist along the margins of race and gender often grapple with which area of their identity is primary, not realizing they do not have to choose. I would be interested in interviewing Black women graduate students about their identity development because perhaps with more experience in higher education, they might be able to consider an intersectional racialized and gendered identity. However, if those women would still make their racialized identities the most salient form of how they author themselves in a PWI, then they would further support the toxic violence of daily experiences of racism. Additionally,

many women grapple with their gender identity when they become a mother. Mothering in academia is a topic I would like to explore because it became one of my identities as I finished my dissertation, and it directly influenced my Black Feminist thought and how I understood the participants' experiences.

Conducting a study with Black women graduate student mothers would provide information in a number of areas. It would provide a counternarrative to the ways in which mothers are understood as scholars. It would be a space in which to gather further understanding of race and gender identity at the intersection of motherhood. As I completed my proposal, I became a mother and it shifted the way I thought about my experiences as a Black woman but also as a graduate student leader. I often wonder what types of resources, support, and guidance mother-scholars receive when pursuing their degrees, whether it be at the undergraduate or graduate level. Additionally, it would be valuable to learn about the barriers to graduation mother-scholars encounter coupled with the daily challenges of motherhood. Another facet of the study of motherhood would be comparing how the mother-scholars value university resources used to recruit students like them.

Black women graduate student identity development is another area for future studies, potentially as a follow-up to this exact study to learn how the women might consider their gendered, racialized, and intersectional identities with more time and experience in higher education. If the same participants were unavailable, learning about a different set of graduate students could prove to be just as useful because the sentiment remains that there could be a matured understanding of their intersectional identitities upon experiencing graduate school. Further, adding the criteria of each Black woman also being in a historically Black Greek letter organization could change the focus of the study when working with graduate students. I would

211

be interested in adding that criterion because it may show an earlier understanding of gendered or intersectional identities due to the sisterhood established in historically Black sororities.

Another area to explore would be the lived experiences of Black women undergraduate student leaders who have been elected as vice presidents or presidents of student government at a PWI. It would almost be identical to this study, but it would be with students who were elected by their predominantly white peers to serve as their leader while living as a Black woman. Learning about the experiences of Black women in student government could provide other ways in which the intersection of gender, race, and leadership exist within predominantly White instutitions. Such a study might also reveal additional stages to be added to the Leadership Identity Development Model when explored with an intersectional lens.

Other areas of research with Black women in college could include their experiences at different types of institutions such as historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, women's colleges, tribal colleges, private institutions, and community colleges. As colleges become increasingly diverse, it is imperative that studies with inclusion of Black women remain prevalent.

Concluding For Her, For Us

Historically, Black women have supported, loved, and lifted up one another. We have mothered communities that were not our own while simultaneously raising our own. We have persevered because we had to. We have learned and taught when no one else would teach us. Black women have been discriminated against in the worst ways and still we rise (Angelou, 1978). The following section was inspired by the popular blog ForHarriet[4] (Foster, K., 2017)

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[4] ForHarriet is an online community for women of African ancestry. We encourage women, through storytelling and journalism, to engage in candid, revelatory dialogue about the beauty and complexity of Black womanhood. We aspire to educate, inspire and entertain.

founded and edited by a Black Feminist, Kimberly Foster. I have chosen to use the theme of ForHarriet to highlight the implications of this study while paying homage to Black women leaders past, present, and future.

For Ida, Oprah, Kimberly, and Future Journalists

The room I have created to have conversations about Black women in physical spaces that have historically marginalized and oppressed them is adjacent to the work of Ida B. Wells, Oprah Winfrey, and Kimberly Foster. Each woman has published or produced work within a platform accessible to their generation. Each woman has pushed boundaries; caused discord in mainstream arenas; and ultimately created a name, space, and voice for Black women. For these reasons and many more, I honor them.

Although this study is not about Black women journalists, I think it is important to acknowledge change agents in this field because they often create space for us to have conversations about Black women that are uncomfortable. In many cases, they also depict Black women as normal and not Othered, which also helps when having conversations about Black women with mainstream audiences.

For Black women journalists past, present, and future, I see you and I appreciate your work. You have been subversive geniuses, sometimes having to hide your identity, and often being disregarded because you dared to write, produce, or unveil the truth. In doing so, you held up your community and you were true to who you are and to your people. Thank you.

For bell, Gloria, and Future Scholar Activists

Scholarly activism often shifts with the social movements prevalent at the time. The literature created through this research shows a need for research about undergraduate scholar activists. An area added to current literature is the idea that within leadership positions, Black

undergraduate women are creating programming that supports social justice activism. The participants described marches, silent protests, and the aftermath of social justice programs. Most of the programs they described could easily transfer into research projects centering Black experiences. If more undergraduate Black women learned how to conduct research, they would be able to produce literature about the programming they do and its impact on their campus community as well as speak as insiders of the community instead of being spoken about by outsiders, furthering self-authorship and self-dependency within a collegiate setting.

To the past, present, and future scholar activists, thank you for your willingness to infiltrate the system. You have learned how to write, teach, and speak in a language that is foreign to you in order to address the inequities within our society, typically highlighting education. You are academic warriors and I thank you.

For Patricia, Angela, and Future Black Feminists

Patricia Hill-Collins created Black Feminist Thought because there was minimizing of Black women's identities within academic literature and settings. Black women were often reduced to being understood and read as breeders, welfare queens, overtly sexual, and housekeepers. Historically, our identities have not been examined and when they are, often it has been monolithic. This study aims to inform the discourse that continues to marginalize Black women by using positive counternarratives of Black women leaders.

As I have explained, it took these participants a while to understand that they existed along an intersection of various identity categories. Therefore, I believe a Black woman identity development theory would be a necessary grounded theory to establish why and when Black women begin to understand themselves as Black women. I believe it is important to begin discussing this intersection early to help Black women understand the many ways they are

214

discriminated against, but also for them to understand themselves aside from biology. As I wrote about, too often the first introduction for the participants to womanhood was her menstrual cycle. As much as Black families discuss race, it is equally important to address gender roles and harmful stereotypes and potential experiences women face.

To Patricia, Angela, and the present and future Black feminists: thank you for your work. Please continue to share stories of Black women doing anything and everything. We are not only negative and damaging stereotypes, we are queens, we are mothers, we are partners, and we are strong. I appreciate your hard work and the persevering spirit you have led with in order to allow me to write a dissertation with such honesty.

For Beyonce, Solange, and Black Women in Pop Culture

Popular culture is often the catalyst for social change and a large influencer of future generations. As mentioned previously, the social justification of qualitative research is important and necessary. To design a qualitative study, social reasons and social justice reasons should be at the forefront of the purpose. In this study, the rampant murders of Black people and the erasure of Black women from the narrative of Black people being killed is one of the more prevalent social justifications for conducting this research. I chose to highlight the social justification using popular cultural icons like Beyonce and her sister Solange because they used their status and music platform in 2016 specifically by releasing albums that highlighted the lives of Black Americans and specifically Black women.

Although this study will not dismantle the institutionalized racism present in our justice system or education system, it does aim to highlight the barriers Black women and girls face when matriculating through the education system. I discussed the attempt of replacing one category of identity, the lack of Black women's leadership in both K-12 and higher education

and the unfair and unrealistic punishment of Black girls and women in education. This literature provides a counternarrative to the idea that only Black boys and men need interventions within education and brings awareness to the treatment of Black girls and women at all levels of education.

Beyonce and Solange released music that embodies the strength, resilience, and ambition of Black women. Their music gave me strength to persevere throughout my writing as well as provided me with a way to cope and practice self-care when multiple Black people were being murdered. Historically, Black people have used music and dance to communicate and I believe the Black women within the industry continue that tradition. To Beyonce, Solange, and the future Black women in pop culture, thank you for being trendsetters, for sharing our culture even when you know it could be misunderstood by mainstream audiences. I appreciate your honesty and your willingness to share your life through your art. I honor you.

For Michelle, Alesia, and All Black Mothers

As I thought about who I wanted to honor within the context of this study, I chose to highlight Black mothers because in many ways they are the matriarchal center of the Black community. None of my participants were mothers; however, two of them were raised by single mothers and they all held their mothers in great regard. They spoke of the sacrifices their mothers made to make sure they were involved in different activities. They explained the network of mothers that helped raise them from their own mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and teachers. In all of their explaining, they always returned to their mothers even when their mothers frustrated them; they remained an integral part of their community and their cultural identity.

Black women have literally mothered nations. Michelle Obama, the 44th First Lady, along with a number of mothers to include my own mother, Alesia Flagg, continue the tradition by providing community wherever they go. Michelle Obama led as the nation's mother for eight years while also rearing her own daughters. My mother has been a mother to my brothers and me, my cousins, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, and neighbors. Black mothers have rebuilt churches and guarded homes when their men were working or at war. Black mothers are the pillars of the Black community, and I celebrate them.

The Black mother is the community and they are the reason the participants were able to gain their leadership skills. When I analyzed the data, I noticed that each participant experienced support from their mother first. This example of support led them to expect a certain type of support from then onwards. Studies have been done on support systems for Black women (Bartman, 2015), but this study could also add to that literature by providing unique information on the role mothers play as a support system for Black women. All the participants discussed calling their mothers for reinforcement while in college. Thus, their mothers allowed them to experience college, but they never discontinued mothering.

I became a mother during the writing of my proposal, and it changed the way I thought about my work and my commitment to Black feminism and the progression of Black people. As a mother, I realized the responsibility I have to my son and my husband but also to my extended family. This work is not just for me and my inner circle, this work could affect future generations of Black women, scholars, and mother-scholars. I honor Black mothers because without them I would not be the woman I am today. I would not be a scholar and I would not know that I could be a scholar activist combining my academic expertise with my desire to better the world and specifically the plight of Black women and girls. To Michelle Obama, my mother,

Alesia Flagg, and all Black mothers past, present, and future. Thank you for your sacrifice, your love, your support, your sweat, your tears, and most of all your prayers. You have taught us lessons that are irreplaceable and created a path to usher in greatness. I owe my success to the Black mothers who came before me because they sacrificed themselves so I could have the opportunity to do what I do today. Thank you.

For Teara and Future Academics

I self-titled this section because it serves as a reminder for my role in my current and future work and those who will walk a similar path as I did.

To my future peers, colleagues, and to myself: You stand on the shoulders of giants. You are walking in your purpose and you are where you are supposed to be. Never forget that you are the descendant of kings and queens. Your history did not begin with slavery and that is not your narrative to depict. I honor us because we are the future journalists, politicians, scholars, entertainers, and academics. When we join forces, we are unmovable. I encourage us to look to each other for support, reflect on the sisters that came before us and remember we do not need validation from others. We are enough.

Collectively, I hope this research provides an opening for the conversation about ways to improve the experiences of Black women in education and specifically in higher education. However, I do not believe the improvement of Black women's experiences in higher education can be executed without examining the toxicity of the discriminatory forces in K-12 education. I hope the research presented will support Black women aspiring to be in leadership positions and those currently in leadership positions both within and outside of the academy. Lastly, I hope that this research creates an opportunity for Black women to be able to have a seat at the table,

the boardroom, the Regents' table, the student government table, and in some cases even the

lunch table.

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Appendix A – Email Solicitation

Dear [name],

I am writing to ask for your participation in a study aimed at exploring the lived experiences of Black undergraduate women student leaders. The primary requirement is that you are a current or past elected or appointed student leader, self identify as a Black woman and are a third or fourth year student. Your participation is completely voluntary and will include 2-5 meetings where you are asked about your experiences. All meetings will be held on the campus of Kansas State University.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Teara Lander by replying to this e-mail or by phone at 405-650-0700.

      -Teara Lander

<center>**Appendix B – Informed Consent**</center>

<center>**CONSENTING TO THIS STUDY AND CONSENT FORM**</center>
<center>[The Exploration of Black Women Student Leaders: A Narrative Case Study]</center>

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, there is a one-page consent form at the end of the study that you can sign to record your consent.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of three Black collegiate women leaders in higher education in their third and fourth years of study in a Predominantly White Midwestern institution.
You were selected to be a possible participant because you meet the above criteria.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in a minimum of three interviews, write about your experiences with the assistance of prompts provided by the researcher, and submit archival documents and photographs that elicit memories about your leadership development and education. This study will take three months. Over the course of the these months, I will interview you for approximately an hour on three separate occasions, ask you to take photographs that depict your leadership and educational experiences, and follow up with you to review data, to check for accuracy of transcription, verification of meanings made, and verification of findings.
Your conversations will be audio taped and artifacts will be copied. Documents supplied by you would be analyzed for themes and patterns of your lived experiences .

What are the risks involved in this study?

There is no foreseeable risk for participating in this study. At any point participants can exit the study if she feels uncomfortable without penalty.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

There is no direct benefit for you to participate in this study.

Do I have to participate?

Your participation is voluntary. You can exit the study anytime without any penalty or prejudice.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

The records of this study will be kept confidential. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published or presented. Research records will be stored securely and only my dissertation chair, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, will have access to the records.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Teara Lander at 405-650-0700, or at flagg@ksu.edu or tflagg10@gmail.com or Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya at 785-532-1168 or at kakalibh@ksu.edu

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?
This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Kansas State University.

Signature
If you agree to participate in this study, then please read the consent form on the following page, ask any questions you have about the study, and sign at the bottom to demonstrate understanding of your expected role in this study.

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Participant   Signature   Date

Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in a case study as part of a doctoral dissertation by Teara Lander chaired by Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya (785-532-1168) from the Department of Educational Leadership at Kansas State University titled *An Exploration of Black Women Student Leaders: A Narrative Case Study*. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is designed so that the researcher can gain some understanding of my perspectives as an undergraduate Black woman student leader at a Predominantly White institution.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following:

1. Attend three one-hour interviews with the researcher.
2. Clarify any follow-up questions the interviewer might have when interpreting my words.
3. Allow the interviewer to provide prompts for outside participant writing.
4. Share relevant documents with the interviewer such as photographs, archival documents and artifacts.
5. Check for accuracy in the researchers' transcripts and findings when depicting my information.

I understand that:

- The researcher will audiotape conversations and interviews that occur between the researcher and me.
- The data will be kept by the researcher and will be shared while maintaining confidentiality with   Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya.
- The researcher will analyze the data and keep it for no longer than one year for educational and research purposes after the last date of data collection.
- There is no direct benefit for me participating in the project.
- No risk is expected but, if I experience some discomfort or stress during observations or conversations, then I can choose to discontinue my participation in the study without any penalty.
-

No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare (for example, if I were injured and need physician care) or if required by law.

I will be assigned a pseudonym which will be used in interview transcript and all other data documents.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form, to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Participant   Signature   Date

Please sign two copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix C – Timeline of Data Collection

Table 1

Data Collection Timeline

Date	Project Item	Participant's Role
Week 1	Identify student leaders	None
	Contact Black Voices United president by email	None
	BSU president nominates potential participant names	
	Contact potential participants	Meet with researcher to become aware of project and gain an understanding
	Journaling	None
Week 2	Create consent form	None
	Meet with potential participants to establish relationship/rapport	Meet with researcher to become aware of project and gain an understanding.
	Provide participant with consent form	Sign Form
	IRB Form	Ask questions of researcher
	Bracketing	None
	Journaling	
Week 3	Choose participant	None
	Collect data sources from participant	Provide data sources
	Meet with participant for first interview – document/video elicited	Answer questions asked by researcher
	Transcribe Interview	
	Journaling	None
Week 4	Member check with participant	Respond to transcription
	Do preliminary coding from first interview	None
	Peer debriefing	
	Participant Writing	
	Journaling	Write with prompt guide
Week 5	Meet with participant for second interview – semi-structured	Answer questions asked by researcher
	Transcribe interview	
	Member check with participant	None
	Journaling	Respond to transcription

Week 6	Do preliminary coding from second interview Peer debriefing Do preliminary coding from other data sources Participant Writing Journaling	None Write with prompt guide
Week 7	Meet with participants for third interview- semi structured interview Ask for Photo Elicitations and Artifacts Transcribe Photo Elicitations Transcribe Participant Writing Journaling	Answer questions asked by interviewer Take photographs with prompt guide None
Week 8	Do Preliminary coding from third interview Analyze other data sources Member check with participant from photo elicitations Transcribe Interview Journaling	 None Respond to transcription
Week 9	Do preliminary coding from photo elicitations Peer debriefing Journaling	None
Week 10	Triangulation of data Journaling	None
Week 11	Peer review of codes/categories/themes Journaling	None
Week 12	Member check with participant on codes/categories/themes Journaling	Provide feedback to researcher
Week 13	Write up Journaling	None
Week 14	Write up Journaling	None
Week 15	Finalize write up	None

Appendix D – Cross Comparison Data Chart

Table 2

Participant Comparison Chart

	Janelle	Issa	Yara	Aja
Intersctionality				
	VP vs. President Cheering Colorism Perceptions from Black men and women Am I a girl or woman??	Representing all Black kids so they can be treated differently and see a Black teacher Other in Class Isolated in Class Role Model Dirty Hair at sleepover	Discriminated as a woman and Black person Lack of attention from Black men Self-efficacy as Black woman	Feeling of admiration Backlash from peers in leadership positions Perceived a particular way as a Black woman
Black Identity				
	Colorism Feels like a zoo animal at PWI Mulatto examples BFSA Support	Speaker for all Black people in class Yik Yak incident and feeling of unsafe environment	Parent Support Not feeling supported by Black men as a Black woman Power in being a Black	Self-love Power and influence I am not my hair Rooms full of white people @DMU Repressing
Womanhood				
	Period Doesn't feel like a woman	Had to ask if her earing were to big for student teaching Period	woman Racism being yelled at to go back to Africa Only Black person in class Token Black friend in elementary Business student	feelings in class Power in Biblical way Backlash from Black men
Leadership Development				
K-5				
6-12	Cheering	Church	Civic city Basketball	Cheer
Pre College	Basketball and Cheer		Science Club	
College	Cheer BVU Alpha Kappa Alpha Honorary Leadership Program Leadership Studies	Horizons BVU-CSU BVU-DMU Sigma Gamma Rho Union worker Student teaching	MAPS BVU Freshman Action Team Zeta Phi Beta Business Internship	Cheer MANNRS SGA

Table 2 (continued)

	Janelle	Issa	Yara	Aja
Education				
K-5	Teacher and homework	Microaggressions	Absentee Parenting Switched schools	Supportive teachers Friends with disabilities
6-12	Period Wesley Scholarship	Period	Odd friendships Learning challenges	Cliquish
Pre College				
College	Learned to study Public Relations Student	Horizons Big 12 Conference GPA and Study Skills acquired Teacher Education	Changed majors Homesickness Class problems with peers internship	Low GPA Agro Communication
Barriers				
	Microaggressions Abuse of intelligence Abuse of respectability Self- Black lens GPA Study skills Institutional Racism	Self-efficacy Lack of Black teachers Naps Study Skills Racism Lack of Black Leaders	Racism Sexism Peers in class Racist attacks Learning problems Access Self esteem	Racism Sexism Self Black Peers Lack of study skills
Support				
	Mom, grandparents, sisters, teachers, staff, faculty, peers, Wesley Scholars, Student leaders, Sorority sisters	Mom, brother, church family, CSU BVU President, BVU-KSU advisor, Peers, sorority sisters, BVU exec board	Parents Sisters HS Program Teachers Faculty Sorority Sisters	Staff MANNRS Coaches Administrator SGA Staff Mentor Cheer squad Roommates