

Illuminating black student experiences in higher education: a critical narrative inquiry

by

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B.S., Kansas State University, 2005
M.B.A., Kansas State University, 2021

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Staley School of Leadership
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Abstract

White fragility has created a number of problems and challenges for Black students regarding authenticity and equality in the classroom. Racial discrimination in education and its disparities have come full circle mirroring history with the continued fight for an equitable education as a Black student. Black students continue to be mistreated and experience racial discrimination in the classroom (Witteveen & Attewell, 2022). For Black students, the effects of white fragility have a detrimental impact on their academic success, especially on college campuses that are predominately white. Additionally, white fragility has led to disproportionate opportunities for Black students' post-graduation (Witteveen & Attewell, 2022). Black women and men seeking employment post-graduation have a much more difficult time obtaining and retaining work because of white fragility (Witteveen & Attewell, 2022). Research literature surrounding authentic leadership theory (ALT) analyzes the "individual's" authentic behaviors found between the subordinate and the supervisor in a work environment. My research talks about the gap in ATL that disregards authenticity in an academic environment specifically looking at the relationship between Black students and white faculty at predominately white universities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand how white fragility impacts Black students and their self- authenticity in college and post-graduation.

Findings from my research will provide data detailing how Black students struggle with white fragility in the classroom and that white faculty and staff are unaware of this. Findings also provide reasonable solutions for white faculty and staff to help improve and build healthy relationships with Black students in their classrooms.

The qualitative research methods utilized to gather data were face-to face semi-structured interviews, an online survey and a questionnaire. All of the participants were Black and currently attending a large midwestern university.

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Dedication

My dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful, smart, amazing, and talented children; Iam and Syriana. Thank you for your patience and kindness during this long and arduous journey. Thank you for giving me hugs and cuddles when each day seemed so long and unbearable. Thank you for your words of encouragement even at your young ages. I am so blessed to have the best children in the world! I hope mommy has made you proud while setting an example of why it is so important to never give up on your dreams even if the journey seems hard and unclear. I love you so much!

I also dedicate my dissertation every Black student, staff, and faculty member, throughout every generation that has fought to get an education while fighting systemic racism and discrimination. It is so hard code-switching and appeasing others just to feel comfortable in a space that is supposed to be equal for all. Enduring racism in its many forms while trying to help your family survive in a world full of unfairness and mistreatment. However, through all the disrespect and intolerance endured, you never gave up. Your journey and fight have set the tone for what is right and what is wrong. Cheers to the past, present and future fighters for equality!

Preface

My motivation for this paper originates directly from my experienced attending a predominately white institution as a Black woman, student, staff and instructor. After almost 15 years of dedication to my academic journey to better myself and my family, I am sad to say not much has improved for Black and Brown students attending PWI's. As a student, I constantly dealt with the microaggressions from white students and staff. As a student, witnessing white students flourish and you struggle just because they were white and privileged, was disheartening. As a first-generation college graduate, it was difficult and discouraging because in the back of my mind, I knew I had to graduate to help provide for my family. As an instructor, witnessing white staff get promoted or praised for their work but you and your fellow Black and Brown colleagues looked over or overly judged for the same work as white staff was also discouraging. Throughout this paper, I share my personal stories and experiences as a Black student and the different ways white fragility affected me. It is my intention that anyone reading this paper grasp the depth and insight of what it is like to be a Black student at a PWI, and the effects it has on Black students' ability to be authentic and true to "oneself" and your culture. Thank you!

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand how white fragility impacts Black students and their self-authenticity in college and post-graduation. Black students also play an active role in the community which means the effects of white fragility are not only limited to academics. Regular community engagements like visiting grocery stores, churches, public libraries, and even personal engagements like social clubs often bring experiences of white fragility. Black students and their social impact within the community helped me construct an overall understanding of their experiences with the white community and daily living. Research indicates a concern regarding students and their knowledge of the importance of storytelling while correlating real-life experiences and challenges in the classroom (Einola, 2021). Social engagement like those mentioned above offers in-person experiences dealing with white fragility and self-authenticity. Authentic leadership theory (ALT) is defined as, “knowing oneself and acting according to one’s “true self while influencing others” (Alvesson & Einola, 2019, pg.5). Also, research literature surrounding authentic leadership theory (ALT) looks at the “individual’s” authentic behaviors found between the subordinate and the supervisor at the work environment. This leaves a gap in ALT within academics, specifically Black students, and their relationship with white faculty and staff. To get a better understanding of this gap, this study will use a critical narrative inquiry approach by sharing stories and experiences to provide a clear and intimate look at how white fragility affected each participant and the result. Researching authentic leadership theory through a critical lens, I intended to help my intended audience think deeply about white fragility and its impact on Black students. The critical narrative methods I utilized were face-to-face semi-structured interviews, an online survey, and a questionnaire. The participants were Black males and females currently attending a large midwestern university.

The Academic Classroom and The Black Student

Most recently the Supreme Court of the United States dismantled the Affirmative Action law requiring colleges and universities to monitor equality within races when accepting and denying students to their educational institution (Bowman, 2023). The Affirmative Action law was enacted on March 6, 1961, with the intended purpose of providing diversity and a more equitable balance in recruitment and hiring between white people and minorities within education and the workforce (History, 2021). When Black students lack diversity within their academic environment, Jones (2020) states that they are more likely to have lower grades, mental health issues, or worse, suicidal ideations. Considering the many challenges (no fault to their own) Black students experiences even before entering the classroom, how can society expect Black students to show up authentically, get involved, and perform academically? Black students often feel out of place and ostracized because of the racial imbalance found in the classroom and at predominately white institutions, in general. When Black students try to seek help for these challenges, they find limited access to and options for therapeutic care and resources.

The implications of minimal access to critical care are low attainment of higher education, health issues, or lower income compared to their white counterparts post-graduation (Jones, 2020). Inside the classrooms, Black students also experience emotional distress because of racial discrimination (Cook, 2015). Black students are worried about their impact on society and long-term generational success if they do not graduate and get a job (Jones, 2020). These worries were associated with low academic performance and fewer employment opportunities after graduation (Caldera, 2020).

While attending PWIs, Black students repeatedly complained of mental health issues because of the discrimination (Jones & Rogers, 2022). Powell (2021) argued that Black males

were viewed as a threat and constantly felt like they were at a disadvantage academically and socially on white campuses. Because of this, Black male students often felt intimidated, leading to decreased socialization, and learning in the classroom (Cook, 2018). Black students may also feel unmotivated and fatigued while trying to learn in predominately white spaces (Cook, 2015). Powell (2021) further argued that Black students experience a lack of family support, counseling, and other detrimental resources to manage mental illness and other challenges. The lack of these resources can lead to well-being and welfare complications as they progress through their academic careers (Matthew, 2022). Black students also experienced an absence of support from their school administrators and staff. This lack of support could affect their ability to manage stressful conditions or experiences while in the classroom and in general at PWI (Matthew, 2022). As a result, Black students experienced acute and chronic stress (Matthew, 2022). Powell (2021) states the shortage of Black faculty also affects Black students' and their academic careers. Black faculty are found to be sources of support for Black students while they manage stressful conditions caused by white fragility.

Powell (2021) states,

Black students further expressed their concerns about the inequality within the academic system in support of Black students and their cultural needs. Black students experience challenges connecting with white students while attending predominately white institutions. (p.43)

Matthews (2022) reported that Black students at PWIs indicated they failed to find mentors who could help guide and lead them. Because of this, Black students did not attend classes regularly and did not engage with faculty (Matthews, 2022). All of these challenges ultimately lead to Black students experiencing mental and physical exhaustion (Powell, 2022).

Problem Statement

Black students at predominately white institutions experience numerous challenges while pursuing higher education because white fragility (Jones, 2023). These challenges range from lower graduation rates, mental health issues, emotional distress, early dismissal, threat of violence and even suicidal ideations (Feagan & Sykes, 1995). Literature suggests the lack of participation in leadership roles and activities has a direct impact on academic success. However, Black students and their access to leadership experiences was hindered because of white fragility and related racial barriers (Feagan & Sykes, 1995).

Through semi-structured interviews, I sought to ask and answer the following primary research questions:

- (1) What is “authenticity” and “leadership” for Black students at predominately white institutions?
- (2) How does the historical and social cultural experiences of Black Students’ impact their authenticity and overall academic journey?
- (3) What would be the ideal learning environment for Black students in predominantly white schools, to help navigate white fragility and its effects?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how white fragility impacts Black students and their self- authenticity in college and post-graduation. The researcher anticipates findings that would expose systemic and relational obstacles for authentic leadership development and expression. Because of white fragility, Black students are unable to build authentic relationships with fellow classmates, faculty members and most importantly, themselves (Feagin & Sikes,

1998). The researcher attempted to express these stories and experiences through a critical lens which allowed for in- depth analysis of the Black student experiences and white fragility. The researcher will detail in Chapter Five the implications of these inauthentic behaviors. The implications of white fragility on each participant led to mental health issues, lower graduation rates and more. In addition, literature states Black students within predominately white classrooms had little, if any authentic relationships with faculty and staff which impaired communication and relationship building (Gardner, 2010). With the conclusion of this study and data, Black students expressed experiences an unfair and unequal opportunities in and outside of the classroom.

Positionality Statement

As the qualitative researcher, a Black female, student, instructor, and a graduate of a large midwestern university that is predominately white, I recognize my individual opinions, experiences and feelings regarding this subject matter highly influence my study and my participants. I have a strong passion for this subject, so I limited my individual opinions and assumptions while in conversation during these face-to-face interviews. Because of my similarities as mentioned above to my participants, my experiences could contribute a false in-depth understanding of these experiences the participants faced. For that reason, my individual experiences could project more empathy and sensitivity towards the participants, allowing for a more comfortable environment which could lead to increased trust. Personal attitudes, opinions, or past encounters could impact how my research is analyzed altering objectives and conclusions. It was essential since I would recognize my biases and lessen their effects through reflective thinking and meticulous data analysis (Talley& Matthews, 2020). I would make subjective judgments when categorizing the qualitative information, evaluating the outcomes,

and spotting themes and trends. This is because unconscious biases or preconceived assumptions could affect how I examine and interpret the data, resulting in biased results.

I carefully watched my responses to protect the participants' right to free speech and improve the validity of the data by using neutral tones and expressions on my face.

I prohibited managing the data flow or inducing people to react in any specific way through these closely watched efforts to remain methodical (Ferrario & Stantcheva, 2022). Furthermore, I also used closed-ended questionnaires to analyze the interview and survey data since it was centered on the respondents. I was able to reveal the significance these students interpret of their observations from an inner perspective by studying the various narratives shared by participants. To protect participants' identities, I will utilize anonymous identities.

To prevent incorrect word interpretation, I will employ repetition and clarification of the substance. However, there will be the need to avoid biases by managing personal positions and experiences that may insult the integrity of my research. The feedback of the research participants will be embraced within the research analysis. The experiences of Black students from this sample will be recorded based on the effects encountered in these learning spaces. However, the analysis will consider ethical practices toward enhancing quality outcomes. Ethical practices will involve privacy and confidentiality promoting efficiency in the data analysis.

Graduation Rates for Black Students Within Higher Education

As of 2020, Black students, between the age range of 18-24 represent thirty percent of students located at predominately white college campuses and universities (PNPI, 2020). Since the Fall of 2010, enrollment for Black students have declined 22% (PNPI, 2020). As a result, Historically Black Campuses and Universities, since the Fall 2020, have seen an enrollment

increase. The total enrollment population at HBCU's represent 76% Black students (PNPI, 2020). As of Fall 2020, only 45% of first-generation, full-time Black students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2014 graduated within six years, compared to the total population of students (PNPI, 2020). The enrollment at two-year institutions, amongst first-generation, full-time students beginning in 2017, only 25% of Black students graduated within three years, compared to 34% overall (PNPI, 2020). Of the more than two million bachelor's degrees conferred in the 2019-20 academic year only 197,444 or (9.7%) went to Black students (PNPI, 2020).

Gardner (2005) defines authentic leadership as owning one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants and preferences, or beliefs, or processes captured by the injunction to know oneself. Literature regarding authentic leadership theory (ALT) also assumes the context of "authentic leadership" as the leader versus follower leadership structure (Einola, 2021). This structure is found in the work employee structure with a superior and a subordinate. This leaves a gap for academics and positive student and faculty relationship building opportunities that bridge authentic leadership and behaviors between the student and faculty. Garner (2005) states a key factor contributing to the development of authentic leadership is self-awareness or personal insight of the leader. Because white staff and faculty don't understand how white fragility effects Black students, they do not recognize the signs and behaviors from Black students that may be impacted in the class. In chapter 3, 4 and 5 further discussion and data will be shown to help explain.

Critical Race Theory and Authenticity

Critical race theory (CRT) is the idea racism grows beyond individual prejudice deeply integrated into American society and legal frameworks to preserve white dominance (Cook, 2015). Critics view CRT as a divisive theory contributing to racial tensions that undermine meritocracy among educational institutes (Cook, 2015). Because of the constant attempts to remove critical race theory from academics, the perpetuating of stigmas and stereotypes oriented to further disenfranchise and marginalize the accomplishments in Black culture, (like the teaching of Black history or the employment of Black educators) has hurt the teaching of Black history. Teaching CRT in the classroom is necessary in order to move forward equitably, and also helps dismantle the current teaching of history that only favors white people and their beliefs (Cabrera, 2018). Unfortunately, PWI's, educators and politicians, reject teaching CRT in schools, suggesting it is unnecessary or will only bring harm to white students (Cabrera, 2018). White fragility continues to be the reason for the removal of CRT within academics (Cook, 2015). Still, there is no disdain for the continued teachings of untrue historical information being passed down regarding the discovery of the US and the real reasons for the creation of slavery. These lessons have been whitewashed or removed, ensuring White students see their demographic as heroes, explorers, and revolutionary trailblazers (Tosolt, 2019). White fragility also impacts academic curriculum (Cook, 2015). This indefinitely affects Black students, educators, and administrative leaders, specifically in the classroom and office spaces (Cook, 2015). This then leads to social pressures within the Black population wherein they are often expected to oblige their counterparts' feelings by prioritizing theirs above their own (Graetz et al., 2022).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Authentic Leadership Theory (ALT) seek only to create equitable opportunities for all individuals (Cook, 2015). Still, even the notion of equity can lead to white cognitive dissonance. Author Langrehr (2021) states white fragility has become such a recognized problem in and out of the classroom a scale was created to address the intolerance and discomfort white people feel when racially triggered.

Langrehr (2021) stated:

The numerous ways white educators utilize their behavior to restore their own racial comfort via a 21-item scale. This scale, which tested over 550 participants, indicated emotional defensiveness, accommodation or safety, and exceptionalism were the most prominent. Further results indicated the greatest triggers for white fragility are colorblind racial attitudes, social dominance orientation or an otherwise indoctrination into white supremacy and privilege, and associations with modern racism. (p.13)

These aspects of white fragility hinder Black authenticity in the classroom and in higher education. For Black students, the inability to be authentic in the classroom may resemble emotions like silence and ostracization inside and outside the classroom (Wiewiora & Kowalkiewicz, 2019). There are several examples of hindrance, but the two most prominent are code-switching and emotional subjugation (Spencer et al., 2022). However, a more focused definition would insist upon behavioral modifications where Black students change their look, behavior and speech, tone, etc., even hiding aspects of their personality to ensure they do not cause discomfort in their white counterparts (Spencer et al., 2022).

Marion et al., (2021) stated:

An arguable aspect of code-switching emphasizes the emotional expression and behavior of Black women. The stereotype of the otherwise angry Black woman as a systemic

mechanism to devalue and dehumanize Black women, ensuring any relevant, credible, or justifiable emotional expression or behavior they have paints them as somehow irrational or unhinged. (p.23)

Code-switching is found to happen more with Black women than Black men (Spencer et al., 2022). Like any other race of women, Black women should be entitled to express themselves no matter the space. However, because of white fragility Black women are constantly code-switching, hiding their authentic feelings in order to avoid discrimination, stigmatization or worse consequences. As a Black woman, I have experienced many scenarios where I needed to “fake smile” and raise my voice two octaves higher so that my white colleagues or fellow students did not think I was angry or in a bad mood. Which could then result in my classmates getting upset or feeling offended or even attacked. These instances have resulted in “Black” colleagues or students getting a written warning for behavior or removed from the course for interrupting the class (Wang & Toro, 2021). Black men also suffer from code-switching (Beatty, 2023). Black men throughout history are seen as thugs or criminals with no real drive in acquiring a higher education (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). For these very reasons, “Black male initiatives” have emerged around U.S. college campuses (Beatty, 2023). These initiatives are designed to support them in academics and social engagements so that they are not harassed or threatened and forced to leave school (Beatty, 2023).

Theoretical Assumption

When faculty and staff are committed to research in the pursuit of helping provide equal and equitable spaces for Black students, the result is progress in the classroom. This would then apportion Black students to feel like they have an equal opportunity to be successful in the classroom (Feagan & Sikes, 1995). Faculty and staff in leadership positions could consider

redefining “authenticity” that would reflect a more inclusive academic space (Einola, 2021). This would bring awareness of these inequities and open the door to conversation because Black staff and students. If scholars and practitioners in leadership would consider the impact of white fragility, dealing with this behavior could be much easier and impactful.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework aims to examine the experiences of Black students and racial inequality at predominantly white universities found in the classroom. By employing the lenses of social constructivism and symbolic interpretivism, this framework seeks to understand how social interactions, cultural norms, and symbolic meanings shape the experiences of black students within these institutions (Milliken & Schreibe, 2012). Social constructivism posits that knowledge and reality are socially constructed through interactions and shared meanings (Oliver, 2011). In the context of Black students at predominantly white universities, this perspective emphasizes the role of social interactions, power dynamics, and cultural norms in shaping their experiences (Saleem et al., 2021). What causes Black students to code-switch or change their voice while within these white spaces? The theoretical perspective, social constructivism states language and culture are the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality (Akpan et al., 2020).

From a critical perspective it is important to understand why Black students with a history of racial injustices have issues with self- authenticity equating to failed effective communication within these predominately white classrooms. What is “authenticity” and “leadership” for Black students at predominately white colleges and universities? How does this affect Black students and their academic careers? As stated above, Black students show up to

these spaces with adversities potentially causing the lack of ability to be authentic. The shared phenomena within my participants are the following. 1. Black students. 2. They attended a large midwestern university, considered a predominantly white college or university. 3. Each participant physically and mentally felt the effects of White fragility when they took classes. 4. Participants did not feel they could be authentic with fellow white students and/or faculty.

With these shared variables, I will analyze and provide data hopefully lead to positive implications for Black students at predominately white universities around the nation.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study is constructed through a critical lens to help explain and describe using personal narratives and experiences. To effectively explain my research findings, I will engage in interpersonal communication. Personalities emphasizing cooperation and open communication may also impact how research is disseminated through gatherings, media outlets, or outreach initiatives. Furthermore, I will underline heterogeneous personality traits within my research helping to promote innovative thinking and critical thinking while promoting a more coordinated and comprehensive investigation approach (Nadiani & Setiawati, 2022).

Because the researcher is a Black female and has like experiences as the participants, the following limitations should be considered for this study. 1. The researcher's firsthand experiences may introduce bias into the research process, potentially influencing the interpretation of data and findings. 2. The researcher's individual experiences may lead to emotional involvement, potentially impacting their ability to maintain objectivity and impartiality. 3. The researcher's individual experiences may limit their ability to fully understand and capture the diverse range of experiences and perspectives within the black

student population at predominantly white colleges. 4. The researcher's individual experiences may create a power dynamic between the researcher and participants, potentially influencing the participants' willingness to share their experiences openly and honestly. 5. The researcher's firsthand experiences may limit their ability to critically analyze and challenge their own assumptions and biases, potentially affecting the rigor and validity of the research (Nicholar & Erakovich, 2013).

In order to mitigate these limitations, the researcher sought to 1. Reflect on their individual experiences and biases, acknowledging their potential impact on the research process. 2. Engage in reflexivity, continuously examining their own positionality and its influence on the research. 3. Employ rigorous research methods, such as triangulation and member checking, to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. 4. Seek diverse perspectives and experiences within the black student population, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the topic. 5. Collaborate with other researchers or seek peer review to ensure a balanced and objective analysis of the data. By acknowledging and addressing these assumptions and limitations, the researcher can enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research study on black inequality and inequity at predominantly white colleges. (Mwita, 2022, p.12)

Another limitation for this study was the availability of time to interview participants. To increase validity, it is recommended to interview or follow-up with participants at least twice (Sofaer, 2002). The researcher did complete this recommendation.

Scope of the Study

This scope of this study was limited to Black Students currently attending a large mid-western university. There are no specific academic term qualifications or graduation dates that would disqualify a participant. This research study welcomed the participation of all Black students no matter their agreement or disagreement of this study. There are no restrictions on gender, sexual orientation, religion, or personal or professional affiliations.

Community-Engaged Scholarship and Positive Social-Racial Change

According to Sandmann (2023), engaged scholarship is defined as the scholarly pursuit of behavior or educational activities oriented toward artistic, civic, cultural, economic, educational, environmental, scientific, and social wellbeing of people and facilities off-campus. To ensure scholars will engage in the community (local, state, and even federal partnerships) to drive change, we must acknowledge any issue that arises and rectify it to achieve the desired response. However, my plan is only a roadmap for the necessary tools to build and implement such leadership intervention. The initial stages will be education-based, using ALT to assert authority while encouraging acceptance of CRT on our campus, especially PWIs. This effort will emphasize the importance of equality and how CRT can help create equity and inclusivity. Partnerships outside the university will include popular community outreach hubs, such as libraries, non-profit organizations, and medical facilities. I will note medical outreach is not typically related to educational change or inequity in healthcare and education. Still, both are intrinsically linked to the subjugation of the Black community, indicating a need for more expensive networking (Graetz et al., 2022).

The community-engaged scholarship emphasizes working to improve variables off-campus and on-campus. This makes it necessary to partner with on-campus staff, students, and neighboring institutions. Engaged scholarship has experienced the greatest success when community voices are uplifted, indicating what is needed for change and comfort to the greater society (Post et al., 2023). Partnering with on- and off-campus organizations increases the chances of support via multiple networks, including community resources and healthcare. Partnerships with willing political participants will also be necessary, as current legislation and elected officials are actively working against these efforts in blatant support of furthering the white superiority agendas. Entire communities can demand change, but until legislation is congruent minimal if any, change is exacted.

Another implication of this study would be the decrease racially charged, or otherwise related physical and verbal altercations experienced on campuses nationwide. The unfortunate truth of this effort is that it has become more political than educational. Educators and administrative leaders want to prepare students adequately but, in some cases, are not allowed. The recent efforts to halt CRT teachings in many red states indicates that the political authority prefers white superiority while individual educators in these states are breaking this rule, leaving the profession, or otherwise speaking out because they know ignoring CRT will only lead to more unethical, immoral, racist behavior (Bates & Ng, 2021).

Summary

In this chapter I explored the challenges of Black students at PWIs and the challenges they encounter. I also talked about how Black students are forced through assimilation to reverse their uniqueness by code-switching. This entails changing one's behavior, language, and

appearance to conform to the dominant culture and norms, even though this means one must lose oneself and suffer from various mental health issues. In this chapter, I employed a critical lens to explore the multifaceted and structural roots of these difficulties as well. I was able to examine how racism is manifested at PWIs, which could lead to Black students' feeling excluded, lonely or ultimately forced to conform to white norms. Next, with critical approach I was able to show the various systems of power that reinforce and keep divisive issues going.

Lastly, in the upcoming chapters I will expand on the above by offering a more comprehensive explanation for my theoretical framework and expand on the concepts and theories.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

🐦 🐦 *“Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou*

*A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.*

*But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so, he opens his throat to sing.*

*The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.*

*The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.*

*But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped, and his feet are tied
so, he opens his throat to sing.*

*The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom*

Authenticity Through the Eyes of Black Students

If you were to ask a Black student what their definition of authenticity was and if they felt they were able to be authentic versions of themselves in predominately white spaces; it is more than likely they would say no. The definition of authentic leadership theory disproportionately defines “authenticity” and lacks innate understanding and clarification for cultural and systemic barriers keeping marginalized students from, “owning oneself” as defined by (Gardner, Avolio., 2015). It is my hope to identify and make sense of white fragility and how it effects the academic success and growth of Black students in leadership development. Using a social constructivism lens, I will emphasize and make sense of how social and cultural experiences contributed to the construction of learning and development in these white spaces. According to Saleem et al., (2021), social constructivism is a collaborative learning approach emphasizing student involvement, discussion, and knowledge exchange. Saleem et al., (2021) continued to say, *“according to social constructivism, we never know universally true or untrue, good, or bad, right, or wrong. Each of us invents our own universe based on our impressions of reality”* Black students must reinvent their realities to be successful. It is only then; do Black students move forward. My chosen methodology allowed for interpretation through these experiences with storytelling and narrative analysis. My aim as mentioned above was to make sense of my participants’ experiences, find common themes in emotions, values, and beliefs. My chosen method was semi-structured interviews.

While grasping the depth and seriousness of white fragility and the effects on authenticity and leadership, I chose to draw from the power of storytelling to help make sense of the true impact of white fragility and authenticity. Storytelling allows for not only my participants to share their most intimate experiences but also allows my participants to feel a sense of care and

concern they may not have felt during their academic journey and experiences at a large midwestern university. These powerful narratives are intended to inform Scholars within leadership and proponents of Authentic Leadership Theory that the current definition, application and implications are not inclusive and should be reconsidered under another umbrella promoting diversity and adversity regards to authenticity and leadership. First, white fragility creates racial stress, tension, and discomfort in the classroom. Secondly, white faculty and staff within leadership have privileges and entitlements that Black students, staff and faculty do not benefit from. The lack of basic rights and privileges could lead to repercussions like not graduating or suicide.

As a researcher, it was important for me to help close this gap and to help fellow academics make sense of this imbalance. With the use of critical race theory, I was intentional in defining the gaps in authentic leadership theory with hopes of showing disproportions. Currently, the implications of ATL apply if you are a white in a predominately white environment (Einola, 2018).

Authentic Leadership Theory

The concept of "authenticity" can be traced back to ancient Greece. Ancient Greek philosophers stressed authenticity as an important state through an emphasis on being in control of one's own life and the ubiquitous admonition (Gardner & Avolio, 2021). As mentioned, authentic leadership theory is defined as knowing oneself and acting according with one's "true self while influencing others (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). ALT originated in the 1960s to describe how an organization reflects itself authentically through leadership (Gardner et al., 2021). Gardner (2005) states that authentic leaders are positioned to draw from the positive psychological states accompanying optimal self-esteem, and psychological well-being such as

confidence, optimism, hope, and resilience. If as leaders within the field of leadership field believe this to be true, then how can we ignore or neglect that fact Black students are sitting in our classrooms not resembling any aspect of this ideation and in fact are mirroring the opposite? Gardner (2008) also states at the individual level, there is growing evidence an authentic approach to leading is desirable and effective for advancing the human enterprise and achieving positive and enduring outcomes in organizations. Though this is a true statement, it is important to question how one reaches an “authentic approach” without the necessary tools to do so. Despite the number of definitions and correlations, literature continues to box “authenticity” as a vice that is achievable if one only chooses to practice these behaviors in these certain contexts. Literature's answer to evaluating these behaviors is with a “question” which is, “can authentic leadership be taught” (Gardner et al., 2008).

According to Wiewiora (2019), the primary emphasis of authentic leadership lies in validating one's mode of existence, making it authentic. As such, the focus should be on providing leaders with opportunities for self-development in line with the notion of authentic existence. This involves exploring ways to promote authentic existence in white spaces, which can be connected to our experiences and how we derive meaning from them.

According to Corriveau (2020), it is adequate and comprehensive for the essence of the authentic leadership construct to encompass ‘self-awareness and genuine self-expression to be authentic. Caldera (2020) states school leaders or facilitators play a dominant role in the development of authenticity and transformations while in college. These above researchers grasp the individual factors needed once an individual chooses to be “authentic” in these white spaces however they lack adversity. My question is how do Black students get to the space of choosing authenticity when their backgrounds, personal challenges even the actual spaces will

not allow for authenticity? Authentic leadership theory can support the biases and the blinding discrimination and racism you will find within higher education, as discussed in the critical race theory (Lowe, 2019). However, I intend to help make sense of ATL when applied to my participants and why they could not construct their own sense of authenticity within the classroom and in their leadership programs. Next, to uncover any common themes surfacing between my participants and why. Academics in leadership within higher education can create a more inclusive environment is sensitive to the needs and experiences of Black students (Evans et al., 2020). Leadership scholars recognizing this may be a student within your classroom would prove the first step of providing an equitable and equally leadership classroom and facilitation acknowledging background challenges and issues that may keep Black students from being authentic in these challenging spaces.

Authentic Leadership Theory Through a Critical Lens

If we examine and apply the current definition and implications of the authentic leadership theory which is owning one's individual experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs (Gardner et al., 2005). Through a critical lens, this definition potentially fails to represent marginalized people and the true barriers and challenges existing when seeking to be authentic. True representations of authenticity consider the ontological pathways of cultural origins and adversities. I contend that "*the act of authentic leadership and communication*" is another form of white entitlement and privilege that again, does not apply to black students, their academic success and transformational relationship building. If we look at the phrase, "*own their beliefs or preferences*" and apply this to Black students and leadership, this act is almost impossible to employ, because fear of rejection or consequences from their white counterparts (Bryan, 2003).

This past decade has seen a surge in publications about authentic leadership, producing new models, definitions, and theories. The argument is made that ATL is not only wrong in a harmless manner, but it may be outright perilous to leadership, scholars, scholarship, and those who believe in it (Einola & Alvesson, 2021). This perspective supports my argument that ALT is not a one size fits all theoretical assumption. If we consider the application and implications of ALT, many gaps exist needing to be researched so as to provide a more equitable and equal representation for non-traditional spaces and cultures. People of color (POC) specifically Black Students suffer more than any other race while attending college or a university when it relates to authenticity and leadership in the classroom. Authentic leadership theory emphasis not so much what the leader does but who the leader is or should be. The focus then is on the self not the role (Eniola & Alvesson, 2021).

Critical Race Theory

Many Black students do not recognize how often they are met with microaggressions and that this is also a form of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2020). Researcher understand the importance of CRT education and how important it is to move forward equitably, and dismantling the current system in favor of one built on fairness and equality (Christ, 2019). However, as stated previously, many educators and politicians reject the teaching of CRT in schools, suggesting it is unnecessary or will not change anything. Critical race theory seeks to find the underlying racist catalysts to current economic, political, and social inequity in hopes of providing an equitable life for all students in academics (Christ, 2019). As some of the white community push to remove CRT in schools, they have no qualms about the incorrect historical academic lessons still being taught. For example, the early formation of the US, slavery, and the Civil War have been whitewashed, ensuring Caucasian students see white demographic as

heroes, explorers, and revolutionary trailblazers (Christ, 2019). According to Tosolt (2019) early explorers of both North and South America typically proved themselves to be genocidal religious extremist lunatics insistent on forced conversion and theft. There historical facts about racism have been watered down to avoid triggering the white students and faculty. Watering down these facts has direct implications on Black students' and if they show up as their authentic selves. their authentic selves.

The Face of White Fragility

According to DiAngelo (2018), white fragility is a consequence of white racial insulation, which entails being protected from awareness of racism, white privilege, and their individual and collective roles in perpetuating these issues. This insulation diminishes their psychological resilience to racial discomfort, rendering it intolerable and prompting fragile responses (Buchanan & Alexander, 2019). Critical race theory enables the detection of subtle and concealed manifestations of racism within higher education institutions' structures and practices (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT will allow for the scrutiny policies, curriculum, systemic barriers, and campus environments including behavior potentially shared during the interviews and storytelling. CRT identifies areas where Black students are marginalized and are at a disadvantage heavily in comparison to white students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Harper (2012) takes an in-depth look into CRT while focusing on the disparities and challenges Black students face because of white fragility. Ladson & Billings (1998) also discusses the critical race theory in the perception of the legal policies implemented in the United States regarding subdue racial challenges. This would include the recent removal of the Affirmative Action Law, as directly impacts Black students within the classroom. White fragility has a major effect when there is a disproportion between racial populations on campuses (DiAngelo, 2018). On the other hand,

Harper (2012) focuses on the fact that CRT offers a perspective for examining how white fragility may perpetuate racial hierarchies and inequalities in higher education and its long-term effects within Black culture and community.

White fragility and its impact can happen anywhere at any time. Recently, the effects of white fragility and its impact on Black students have been heightened as many schools attempt to engage in Critical Race Theory (CRT) in hopes of promoting antiracist behavior and educational equity. The level of social injustice perpetrated on minority demographics every day in the United States is disheartening. Maintaining a presence in education, both as a student and an educational leader, one would assume a person would be judged based on their intellectual merit and offerings, however that is not so. There are instances, according to Bucholtz (2019) students are judged based on their propensity for emotional disguise, i.e., white fragility.

Many white people face a level of cognitive dissonance when approached with what white fragility is and how it effects Black students (Bucholtz, 2019). The importance of white faculty and staff understanding the effects could build and sustain authentic communications between white staff and faculty. This would then lead to self-reflection for both students and staff. Literature breaks down authentic leadership theory into four approaches that state if present will help construct a model framing behavioral traits of an authentic leader. A. Self-Awareness. B. Unbiased Processing. C. Relational Authenticity D. Authentic Behavior/Actions (Gardner, 2018).

Table 2.1 Traits of an Authentic Leader

Trait	Description
Self-Awareness	On-going process of clarifying emotions, intentions, cognitions, beliefs, values, and talents. One’s leadership is based on convictions and beliefs that emerge from within are shaped by his/her experience.
Unbiased Processing	The process of interpreting events without a bias interpretation and considers all sides that are given.
Relational Authenticity	Ability to maintain open and truthful relationships. This approach encourages the authentic expression of others whom they encounter.
Authentic Behavior/Action	Method for describing individuals who are considered authentic. Ex. “They walk their talk.”

“Authenticity and Leadership” Meets White Fragility in the Classroom

While white fragility is having an impact on school curriculums, it is also having an impact on Black students, educators, and leaders, and how they act in the classroom. White fragility places pressure on the Black population wherein they are often expected to conform to white students and their feelings, prioritizing them above their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and, in some cases, their humanity (Graetz & Boen, 2022). CRT, Social Constructivism Theory (SCT) and Authentic Leadership Theory (ALT) both mentioned in the following section, seek only to create equitable opportunities for Black students and white staff. Because white fragility has become such a recognized problem in and out of the classroom a scale to measure white fragility was created to address the intolerance and discomfort white people feel when racially triggered (Langrehr et al, 2021). Langrehr et al., (2021) reviewed the numerous ways white individuals change their behavior to restore their racial comfort via a 21-item scale. The scale, testing on over 550 participants, indicated emotional defensiveness, accommodation or safety,

and exceptionalism were the most prominent; further results indicated the greatest triggers for white fragility are colorblind racial attitudes, social dominance orientation, or an otherwise indoctrination into white supremacy and privilege, and associations with modern racism, i.e., Slaves were freed, therefore racism cannot exist (Langrehr & Watson, et al., 2021). These aspects of white fragility hinder Black authenticity in the classroom and higher education. Again, the result tends to be the Black community is subjugated to silence inside and outside the classroom to avoid making white individuals uncomfortable.

Gaps in the Literature

While faculty and staff in leadership seek to develop a stronger sense of collective consciousness, we need to weed out theories scoring higher on ideology than intellectual qualities (Einola & Alvesson, 2020). The leadership teacher is supposed to be (or should be) the most authentic teacher (Lowe, 2019). How can students in our classrooms feel authentic with their leader (teacher) or practice authenticity with their leader or classmates if they cannot be themselves? According to Gardner & Avolio (2005), students should expect when they enter the classroom to learn about “leadership” and “development” and how the faculty instructor will bring awareness of the importance of being “authentic” or true to oneself in an inclusive manner. Lowe (2019) proposed these questions for academics within the classroom to consider:

- I. What is the connection between being a scholar and being authentic in the classroom?
- II. What level of disclosure about one’s values, opinions, experiences, etc. is appropriate in the classroom.

To what extent should Black students engage in “racial acting” to feel included within the white classroom? I believe in order to set the tone and drive to want to be authentic in the classroom or any space, especially predominantly white spaces, it is imperative academics consider the answers to these questions and if they are applicable. The lack of considering these questions has the potential to construe an academic environment within the classroom that is not conducive to learning especially for Black students. This opens the door for Black students to experience white fragility and the negative effects that come with them. Kernis (2003) believes for a student to experience authenticity within the academic space, four components must be present, are awareness, unbiased processing, action, and relational. Though all four components are important and must be present, I would like to focus on unbiased processing and awareness. Kernis (2003) defines unbiased processing as the ability to process positive or negative evaluative information objectively. I have identified a gap in the current authentic leadership theory (ALT) that research findings do not address but would add an important perspective to ALT and the implications if we consider the presence and absence of authenticity within the classroom. That is,

Authentic Scholarship within the Classroom

Engaged Scholarship, a movement growing steadily since 1995, offers a new way of bridging gaps between the university and civil society (Beaulieu et al., 2018). At one level, the scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems. Campuses would be viewed by both students and professors not as isolated islands but as staging grounds for action (Beaulieu et al., 2018).

Authentic Leadership Theory (ATL) does not take into consideration the historical social-cultural factors that helped develop and advance Black students while at predominately white institutions. ATL also does not consider the behaviors and actions that are displayed in the classroom that are not authentic to Black students. As previously stated, “racial acting” then becomes the form of engaged communication between faculty members, fellow classmates, and the student.

Beaulieu (2018) continues to say engaged scholarship is characterized by two core values and these core values are so important that faculty and staff should not focus on “how faculty engage (activity) but rather on *why* they engage (value). Many times, you will find within predominately white classrooms faculty and staff are intentional when creating “general practices” encouraging participation with their students. It is also imperative that faculty consider creating “*engagement practices*” which are meant to be inclusive and take into consideration the principles and values of truly engaged scholarship.

Beaulieu (2018) states for faculty and staff to truly be engaging in scholarship they must have met five core principles. It is important to note these principles can be applied to staff, faculty, and students. These principles are:

1. **High-quality scholarship**- Meets the highest academic standards through high-quality scholarship. While engagement requires a profound sense of rigor, it also calls for reconsidering how researchers conduct themselves, to ensure the value and relevance of research on both the social and academic levels. It is important the partners show flexibility and creativity in finding ways not only to produce knowledge in collaboration with actors from civil society, but also to communicate this knowledge to the public.

2. **Reciprocity**- Engaged faculty need to adopt reflective and iterative methods to maximize their impact rather than their products. Broadening and deepening the connections between the university and civil society, partnerships and collaboration are at the heart of engaged scholarship. Partnership should also include non-academic or practitioner partners, who often have a fuller understanding of complex societal issues. Academic engagement considers creating such partnerships to be an integral part of academic functions. Public involvement, the integration of several types of knowledge in knowledge production, and the creation of meaningful interactions are all recognized as critical factors in predicting research use. This suggests the importance of reciprocity between the academy and civil society during not only the production of knowledge, but also its dissemination. It involves sharing knowledge and resources to produce sustainable and mutually beneficial outcomes for both communities and universities.
3. **Identified Community Needs**- Engaged faculty address important civic issues or societal problems. They need to adopt a perspective problem driven rather than theory driven. They are called to be socially responsive and organize intellectual activities deeply rooted in practice.
4. **Democratization of knowledge**- Engaged scholarship argues for the democratization of scientific knowledge and its accessibility for all.
5. **Boundary Crossing**- Engaged scholarship fundamentally involves a multi-inter-disciplinary approach. interaction across disciplines and relevant sectors. Engaged scholarship must overcome disciplinary boundaries I.e., boundary-crossing scholarship. Engagement requires putting teaching and service on a par with research. Integrating academic activities into a coherent whole. Teaching and service activities should be

based on advancing one's research, and teaching should be seen as a form of service to the community.

Beaulieu (2018) also identified two levels of engagement processes needed for scholarship.

These two are:

1. **Individual:**

- a. **Teaching:** Engaged teaching is the most developed of the three academic functions in the literature, especially in the United States. It equates to transmitting, transforming, and extending knowledge and bringing about change in learning with various audiences through either formal or informal arrangements.
- b. **Research:** Engaged research incorporates reciprocal civic engagement practices into the discovery, development, and mobilization of knowledge to the mutual benefit of community and academic interests
- c. **Engaged service:** the application of a professor's expertise and scientific or professional knowledge to address specific issues for the benefit of policy makers, public officials, agencies, organizations, professionals, and civil society.

2. **Institutional:**

- a. **Mission:** For an engaged university, it is essential not only to support research that responds to the needs of local communities and helps those communities, but also to form generations of students who are prepared to contribute positively to the world around them.
- b. **Reward Structure:** Faculty's work has the greatest value when aligned with the institution's missions and strategic priorities. An institution's promotion or tenure guidelines are one of the strongest expressions of its priorities and values.

- c. **Logistical Support:** The role of institutional support is not negligible; it is decisive in helping faculty adequately respond to growing demands they work actively for the public good.
- d. **Student Support:** Some universities offer integrated programs or organize specific projects geared toward developing engagement-oriented skills and interests in organizations outside the university.

This starts by creating and bridging relationships between Black students, faculty and staff to increase communication. Creating programs allowing interaction and relationship building between Black students and white staff. Creating transparent and viable methods of democratization so Black students have access to learning. Ensures faculty are instructing Black students with transparency, honesty and non-discriminative behaviors for retention. Lastly, recognizing and voicing because they are white, they are entitled and privileged. When Black Students Walk into white spaces, they become the minority. Their voice is typically drowned out by the majority, which is predominately white.

White Fragility and Pedagogy

Developing a diverse and equitable teaching pedagogy is one of the most important tools faculty and staff members can use when trying to create the type of academic environment that helps all students. Since pedagogy serves as a representative of the teacher and their beliefs, it is important diversity, inclusion, and equity are well represented. However, many staff and faculty fear repercussions may equate to truly including DEI within their pedagogy.

Laufer (2012) stated,

Many teachers avoided curriculum acknowledging race, class, and gender because of their fear of the uncontrollable emotions such topics might elicit from students. Hooks

argued for students of color, the avoidance of topics such as race may result in discomfort and lack of safety may cause them to shut down. The experience of professors who educate for critical consciousness indicates many students, especially students of color, may not feel safe in a neutral setting. It is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement. (p.19)

White faculty may fear diversifying their curriculum would make white students or their families uncomfortable. This display of white fragility has a direct impact on Black students because they are unable to learn any academic substance that is not centered around white history and white comfortability. This leaves Black students feeling ostracized by the lack of diversity in the curriculum because they are unable to relate to the material.

Black history can be difficult to hear or even teach for white staff and faculty, but that is a further reason why curriculums should be diversified in the classroom. This allows for an open forum and a learning environment to safely learn from one another. Continuing to keep these shared spaces comfortable for white students and staff misses opportunities to teach collectively about Black education and culture. Knaus (2009) argued curriculum based on critical race theory, centered on marginalized groups' narratives, was a way to resist white supremacy. If this is true, then including Black education and culture in your teaching pedagogy provides another way to provide inclusivity for Black students. Laufer (2012) also states removing Black history and education out of the classroom has a direct effect not only Black students but white students as well when trying to understand cultural differences. The fear of negative displays of emotions from both Black and white students provides another excuse to not be inclusive within the classroom. Teachers strive to create a safe and conducive learning environment for their students. If teaching about Black history and culture causes fear, it may be the way we are

teaching Black history. Even though the subject matter is difficult to teach or hear, as staff and faculty we must take steps to begin opening the door for inclusivity in the classroom.

White Fragility Silences Black Identity and Culture

White fragility silences voices and participation in the classroom, social identity, and culture (Einola, 2008). Tajfel (2008) states social identity theory explains that part of a person's concept of self comes from the groups to which that person belongs. An individual does not just have a personal selfhood, but multiple selves and identities associated with their affiliated groups. A person might act differently in varying social contexts according to the groups they belong to, which might include a sports team they follow, their family, their country of nationality, and the neighborhood they live in, among many other possibilities. When Black students are surrounded by identities and cultures, they are not familiar with, code-switching will come into play. Not being allowed to wear clothing that represents Black history, and culture is a form of white fragility (Tharps, 2001). The dictation of language and speech, in the classroom also changes the behaviors and emotions of Black Students (Tharps, 2001). Dialects and tone are used as expressive measures in Black households. When Black students try to physically mirror the words and meanings of their white counterparts to fit, this causes anxiety and fear (Tharps, 2001). Code-switching can also be dictated through hairstyles. Black people have a rich history of what hair styles, texture types and physical additives to their hair represent. Black hair and the variety of styles and ways they are constructed can represent a way of communication, resistance, and independence. For Black Students, especially females' hair represents everything from how they are feeling to changes within their life.

In Africa hair was used to denote age, religion, social rank, and marital status. This is a poignant example of the powerful cultural implications of Black hair. For example, Black

women face a double “othering” through gender and racial oppression as Black hair is politicized and racialized by class and gender. There is an invisible message that white people receive that communicates if a Black woman does not follow the ascribed standards of dress, speech, and behavior, which is normed on Whiteness, she may be aggressive and confrontational. Another misconception is the ‘Afro’ which is commonly considered symbolic of resisting White supremacy. (Johnson, 2013, p.23)

Removing this important cultural expression from the classroom bears extreme implications for developing and expressing true authenticity for Black students. When Black students do not feel comfortable with how they look and feel it could lead to anxiety, depression, solitude, desocialization, mood swings, discrimination, prejudice, racism, a decrease in academic achievement and most tragically suicide (Johnson, 2013).

Authenticity and Leadership Structure in the Classroom

The relationship built between Black students and faculty is very important if you want Black students to be authentic in the classroom. The literature surrounding ALT does not address the importance of authenticity for Black students in the classroom when the majority of people in the class are white. Authentic leadership behaviors and traits look at the traditional work structure with a subordinate and manager and what is needed for that subordinate to illustrate authentic behaviors with their manager (Einola & Alvesson, 2021). There is a gap in authentic behaviors and how it is created between Black students and white individuals at predominately white institutions. Closing this gap with further research would help Black students and white individuals at PWI’s build positive relationships. The outcome of this positive relationship is increased Black student socialization, longevity in academics (graduate school),

positive mental health, good grades, increased graduation, relationship building between students and staff, post-graduation success (employment) and an increase of Black student recruitment within colleges and/or universities.

Black Leadership and White Fragility

The level of social injustice perpetrated on the minority community daily in the United States is disheartening. Because I am a Black female student and educator, I have experienced racism and discrimination more than I would like to remember. With such negative experiences, you hope that one day these inequalities will come to an end and all individuals will be judged based on their intellectual merit and achievements: not their race and sex.

According to Bucholtz (2019), Black students are judged based on their propensity for emotional disguises, i.e., white fragility. When racist white people are confronted with these allegations, they tend to act like they are in denial or act offensively because they are unable to accept the truth about their behavior (Bucholtz, 2019). White fragility has created very few safe places for the Black leaders in the community (Bucholz, 2019). White fragility causes potential Black leaders to hide who they are at their core to make the white majority happy and comfortable with their narrative. When Black people decide to run for leadership positions in the government or even leadership positions in academics, they have to take into consideration the negative consequences that could result because white people disagree with a Black person being in leadership roles. Even if elected or promoted to leadership positions at PWI's, Black individuals' tenure is typically not as long as their white counterparts (Witteveen, 2022). Black individuals typically leave predominately white workspaces because of the stressful work environment created to make Black people uncomfortable (Synder et al., 2018).

Authenticity and the Positive Outcomes for Black Students in the Classroom

For Black students, showing up within any predominantly white space can be a challenge. Making the choice to attend a university or college for four years, which is PW more than likely, was a difficult choice. As stated previously, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) student body is made up of 76% Black students (Bryant, 2023). Public universities and colleges that are predominately white only had a Black student body of 30% (PNPI, 2020). With the statistics above, the imbalance makes it difficult for Black students to feel comfortable and successful in white spaces. If Black students were able to show up in the white spaces as their authentic selves, the potential benefits could be life-changing. For Black students, being able to show up as their authentic selves means they can be fearless. They can share their experiences with their classmates and instructors and expect equal reactions as their white counterparts. Black students showing up as their authentic selves means they can be proud of who they are and where they come from. Attending class in attire that makes them comfortable, instead of what society depicts as aggressive and unprofessional. The ability to wear their hair in hairstyles that express their attitude and demeanor. To be authentic for a Black student, it entails the use of your preferred dialectic and voice and not changing tone or register, to appear happy or friendly. To be authentic means to walk around campus not being discriminated against because a white student or staff member felt like you did not belong there. To be authentic is to join organizations with white students and staff with the objective of diversifying opinions and objectives at these predominantly white institutions for progression. To be authentic is to experience healthy mental health and the ability to share discomforts with white faculty and staff to improve unfortunate circumstances. Lastly, to be authentic would be

the increase in recruitment of Black students at PWI's which results in higher graduation rates for Black students.

Implications and Leadership Interventions

The implications for improving “authenticity” and “leadership” for Black students in leadership programs for practice and future research would be monumental. These implications emphasize the need for more partnerships outside of the university which include avenues like popular community outreach hubs, such as libraries, community centers, churches, and public clubs. Though medical outreach is not typically related to academics, inequities found within healthcare and education are intrinsically linked to the subjugation of the Black community, indicating a need for more expansive networking (Graetz &Boen, 2022).

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher defined and outlined two theoretical frameworks to help provide a rationale for the research topic. The researcher provided a comprehensive definition of white fragility and the impact it has on the leadership development of Black students. Also, each theoretical concept was explained in order to provide the framework for this study's rationale and argument. In Chapter three, the researcher will discuss the chosen methodology. The methodology section will be guided by the following primary research questions: 1. What is “authenticity” and “leadership” for Black students at predominately white institutions? 2. How does the historical and social-cultural experiences of Black Students' impact their authenticity and overall academic journey? 3. What would be the ideal learning environment for Black students in predominantly white schools, to help navigate white fragility and its effects?

Chapter 3 - Methodology

You Want Me to Go Where?

I remember my junior year of high school, sitting in my Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (AFJROTC) class, my wing commander (or teacher) Colonel David Burke, was talking to our class about life after high school and wanted to know what we planned to do for work after high school. Usually, if you are in AFJROTC, you are planning to join the Air Force for your career. When he got to me, he asked me the same question. "Lieutenant Colonel Weathersby, what do you want to do after graduation?" With the look of confusion and embarrassment, I said, "find a job and take care of my siblings." He looked at me with a face of disappointment and disgruntlement. He then said, "I do not think so. You are an amazing leader. You are smart and have the potential to be anything you want to be. Why would you continue doing what you already know does not work or will give you the outcome that keeps you and your family exactly where you are? Have you ever considered joining Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corp (AFROTC?" I had no idea what Colonel Burke was talking about, and I was exhausted from work the night before and wanted everyone to take their eyes off me. He then said, "AFROTC is a leadership training school for people wanting to join the military but in a leadership position. Exactly what you are doing now, but in college. Weathersby, you are an outstanding leader, why not join the military but as a commissioned officer? To do that, you would have to get a college education first. Let us talk more after class." I remember thinking to myself, a college education. What is that? Can I even do that? How much is that? Will my family approve? I do not think at the time I had even considered college because I honestly did not have anyone within my family or at least intermediate family talk about college and what I wanted to be when I "grow up." Most members of my family intermediate and extended are blue collar

workers that never considered getting a college degree. I wanted to share this story because Col. Burke saw within me something no one had ever seen in me at that time. The heart of my research seeks to prove that if Black students can be authentic with white staff in the classroom, there is a possibility that together they can change the entire direction for that Black student. By simply allowing an authentic relationship to bloom, you never know what is blossoming in the background. Because I was able to communicate with Col. Burke in the classroom and was able to develop an authentic relationship with him, I felt comfortable being myself and sharing my challenges. Because Col. Burke knew where I was coming from and my family dynamic, he knew how to communicate with me and how to motivate me. He understood my lens was fractured and that though he could not fix the tragic experiences I have had throughout my life; he could provide a new lens that allowed me to view life a little differently than what I understood it to be. I owe my success to him. He helped me find the courage to do something different with my life. Because of that, I turned out okay. He changed his teaching pedagogy to mirror his class's color, full of Black and brown students from poor homes and families. He knew I was destined for something greater and more impactful. Col. Burke set me on the course for changing the narrative not only for my life but for every generation under me. The rest is history. Rest In Peace Colonel Burke. I miss you so much.

Authenticity and Methodology

This research topic was chosen to shed light on what it is like to be a Black student in higher education at a predominately white college or university dealing with white fragility and its many forms. Leadership in this context refers to leadership in the classroom or in the community where Black students must confront white fragility head-on and its many complexities. The impact of white fragility on Black students and their ability to thrive and be successful is real and disheartening. Literature does not reflect how white fragility impacts Black students and their ability to be authentic in the classroom with mostly white students. This lack of authenticity for Black students hurts their success and overall mental health, as previously mentioned (Erazovich, 2005).

Throughout this chapter, I will discuss how I constructed my research design and the qualitative methods to get data. Each method was chosen to help the intended audience grasp the depth of my findings and to help make sense of the impact white fragility has on Black students. According to Alamari (2019), the researcher must understand the meanings and interpretations of the responses obtained through their study participants regarding their behavior, events, and objects. To understand how my participants developed their problem-solving techniques and to help make sense of interpretations, my theoretical and conceptual frameworks were shaped from a critical social constructivism perspective and symbolic interpretivism lens to help frame and understand shared meanings and experiences. Saleem (2021) states knowledge is acquired through experience. Additionally, Saleem (2021) states learners acquire academic knowledge by utilizing their prior experiences to enrich their learning experiences, understanding, and interpreting the significance of acquired knowledge, especially in adult learners. As a result,

learning occurs because of learners' real-life experiences. I hope to provide these experiences through storytelling during data collection.

Methodological Framework

For this qualitative research study, it was important to grasp each participant's story while also showing how white fragility impacted them and their authenticity and leadership. Narrative inquiry as mentioned helps grasp the heart of these stories while protecting the participants' confidentiality and well-being. It was important to give each participant a voice in each interview that reflected their truth and passion as a Black student. To appropriately frame these stories and experiences, I applied the theoretical perspectives of critical narrative inquiry, symbolic interactionism, and social constructionism to help make sense of their experiences, expressions, and the thought processes behind them.

Critical Narrative Inquiry

Critical narrative inquiry and the quest for knowledge in this qualitative research methodology were intended to advance understanding of the experiences of people across place and time (Gavidia & Adu et al., 2022). This methodology allowed participants to recall memories through self-reflection, storytelling and lived experiences. Memories that participants shared merged from experiences from social, cultural, economic, and institutional experiences. Clandinin (2006) states that by sharing stories we create meaning in our lives allowing others to help build community. Using a critical narrative lens helped make sense of the complexity found in some of the participants' stories.

Saleem et al, (2021) suggest:

In the critical paradigm, the social world is mediated by power relations in a constructed lived experience amidst social and historical contexts, which, in turn, shape social reality. Narrative inquiry is carried out in terms of two paradigm-specific criteria, either an interpretative or a critical paradigmatic position in exploring and understanding the ways people construct meaning of their experiences in social contexts with emphasis on the dialectic stance between the researcher and participants that aims to reach deep insights. (p.26)

According to Hickson (2019), a critical narrative lens allows for a critical reflection by the researchers to help acknowledge the value in each story. This was important because it allowed the researcher to find themes and underlying experiences with each participant. Each participant had a different story, but the impact of white fragility remained the same. Using a critical lens to understand these experiences helped the researcher and participant dig even deeper into each story and experience.

Social Constructivism

Social Constructivism is an approach emphasizing the significant role of human cognition in constructing knowledge and understanding the world. In qualitative research, constructivism provides a framework for exploring how individuals construct meaning from their experiences, interactions, and the social context in which they live (Saleem et al., 2021). When Black students are in predominately white spaces, it is important to understand that there is a sense of miscommunication occurring simultaneously between that faculty member and Black student. There is an assumption from the faculty that Black students are actually being authentic versions of themselves in the class. This is not true. Actually, white faculty and staff do not know

that Black students are not engaging authentically but rather code-switching. It was important for the researcher to illuminate these experiences in their shared narratives in chapters 4 and 5. This was done to hopefully help my audience understand why and how Black students chose to not be authentic in the classroom.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is viewed as an organized process of ongoing, varied interaction among individuals (Milliken, 2012). Thus, there is a constant and iterative interplay between people in interaction and the social context. When people interact, they do so in a socio-historical environment that provides certain meanings and shapes to the interaction, while the interaction creates societal alteration (Milliken, 2012).

Social constructionism's epistemology underpins how knowledge is constructed and embodied in the critical paradigm toward a reality shaped by social, political, and economic values. The critical paradigm, therefore, suggests narratives do not spring from the minds of individuals but are social creations. The power dynamics of societies create practices, systems, and situations of marginalization. (Gavidia et al., 2022, p. 43)

Conducting each interview in an academic space was immensely helpful for my participants because it helped them remember different experiences and stories. Sitting in a certain seat in the classroom helped trigger feelings and moments for my participants. Throughout the shared narratives in Chapters 4 and 5, interactions helped communicate moments and experiences by each participant.

Research Design

Participants

Participants for this research study were Black students currently attending a large midwestern university. Participants' ages range from 18-70 years of age. The participants' sexual orientation, religion or current location will not be taken into consideration as an exemplifier for this study. First-generation students were given priority for this study. Participants were selected and contacted through an online survey, personal invitations, and recommendations.

Participant Selection Process

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher utilized a purposive sampling method to recruit participants. This sample method allowed the researcher to “hand-pick” participants for the research. It is assumed the researcher already knows something about the specific cases and deliberately selects specific ones because they are likely to produce the most valuable data (Rowley, 2013). Sample criteria included: 1) The participants identify as Black and current students at a large midwestern university. 2). Participants have experienced some form of challenge while in attendance (preferred but not required). 3) There were no restrictions for age, sex, religion, sexual orientation, professional affiliations restrictions or graduation status. Potential participants were then asked to complete a questionnaire to help select and eliminate anyone who did not meet the study's criteria. “A questionnaire is a practical tool for quickly gathering data from many respondents. As a result, the questionnaire's design helps gather correct data collection and allows for the analysis and extrapolation of the findings” (Abu et al., 2020, pg. 9). The questionnaire was distributed to potential participants who filled out the survey and met the minimal requirement to participate in the research. The questionnaire also informed participants of the time requirements to be a participant in this research project. The survey was conducted (see Appendix H) with detailed questions regarding students’

participation on campus and gathered more information regarding demography. The survey was emailed to several predominately Black campus organizations by listserv. No student was forced to participate in the survey. All responses were carefully reviewed and organized. Upon completion of reviewing approximately fifty or more surveys, six students met the requirements and were selected to participate within the timeframe of this study. A personal invite was then communicated by phone and email to confirm participation in the study.

Data Collection Methods

When researching any interpersonal phenomenon like white fragility and its effects on Black students, respondents' psychological health may be impacted. Ethnic background, age, socioeconomic circumstance, sexual preferences, and location could have an effect on the participants' mental health. Therefore, it was important for the researcher to use various data collection forms to conduct this research (Abu-Taieh et al., 2020). The researcher considered several narrative approaches and the implications for each and how they would impact the participants. The data collection methods that were selected provided the most impactful, reliable, and valid narratives to help bring acknowledgement to past and current experiences in the classrooms for Black students. These methods were also chosen so that the researcher could be present and prepared to handle any mental or cognitive agitations that occurred due to recanting stories or experiences that may have caused trauma.

The researcher can adjust and change the direction of the questions, especially in a semi-structured interview. The flexible nature of interviews also helps the participants to reveal more about themselves, which, in turn, serves to enrich the qualitative data. This effective instrument allows the interviewer to effectively explore the interviewee's thoughts,

feelings, and opinions. The interviewer can follow up on the thoughts, feelings, and ideas behind the responses in a way that other methods do not allow. (Alarmi, 2019, p.18)

Questionnaire/Survey

As noted above, the questionnaire was used for participant recruitment. However, the researcher utilized data from the questionnaire for further analysis. Questionnaires are one of the most widely used means of collecting data, therefore many novice researchers in business and management and other areas of the social sciences associate research with questionnaires (Rowley, 2014). For this study, the researcher allotted to use both open and closed-ended questions. The first, and most significant categorization of questions are open and closed questions. For the closed-ended questions, the researcher utilized a Likert scale of questions. Closed questions allowed the researcher to gather quick responses and easier coding and analyzing. The use of open questions allowed the researcher to collect more in-depth insights and allow the respondents to use their own language and express their own views (Rowley, 2013). The researcher bracketed any “language or rhetoric” that is foreign to the audience or has a sub-meaning.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The researcher’s primary method of data collection for this qualitative study was through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to record and visibly witness any physical changes or illustrations that could not be depicted through a survey or questionnaire. The researcher consciously bracketed emotions, personal thoughts or experiences that surfaced during the interviews. Because qualitative research can be frowned upon because of validity, especially with narrative inquiry as a source of methodological, several criteria were utilized for the assessment of my research (Almari, 2019).

Gavidia (2022) explained trustworthiness of a qualitative study is examined through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finlay & Ballinger (2006) focused on bridging criteria by demonstrating rigor to be transparent in offering a vivid and insightful interpretation of narratives grounded in the dependability of the methodological procedure. This allowed me to observe extra psychological and behavioral cues, such as dissatisfaction or enthusiasm about the research questions, which you may not see using other interviewing methods (Sofaer, 2002). To maintain validity and reliability, each of the six participant interviews were conducted twice for approximately 60 minutes. This was meant to ensure familiarity with the researcher and for the researcher to note any unusual behaviors or changes in tone indicating either lies or otherwise to be concluded by the researcher. Participants were asked open-ended questions highlighting their feelings (see Appendix C). This helped embrace a variety of perspectives which helped receive quality responses. Open-ended questions also helped highlight experiences of anxiety, anger, and social isolation. Interview questions should not be prescriptive, which mitigates researcher bias (Abu et al., 2020). Non-leading questions make it possible for information to surface.

Participants Consent, Confidentiality, Data Management & Storage

Research participants were encouraged to provide their personal views of their experiences at a large midwestern university, especially within the classroom setting. Interviews were imperative in enhancing the quality of outcomes in helping understand the impact of PWI on Black students. The researcher submitted a request to the IRB at Kansas State University to obtain permission to engage in research. Participants received and signed an informed consent form identifying the purpose and expectations and how each participant's confidentiality would be protected. The consent forms could be signed online, by mail or in person. Digital copies were stored on the researcher's university-issued laptop under a secure drive only accessible by a

numerical passcode. A hard copy was issued to the participant who was then directed to store their copy in a safe place to maintain confidentiality. The researcher was the only person with access to this drive and passcode. Additionally, hard copies were destroyed by a shredder and placed in the secure trash disposal unit at the researcher's university office.

The researcher had no prior knowledge of participants' individual experiences as a student at a large midwestern university. The researcher notes there will be personal identifiers under any circumstance outside of the five-digit numeric. Identity will only be known between the researcher and the participant. Strict anonymity was maintained in order to protect the integrity of each participant. Each participant engagement was noticeably very emotional while sharing their experiences as a Black student. Because of the depth of the stories and detail, the identity of each participant will remain anonymous.

Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher utilized a variety of data collection sources not limited to literature, journals, Zoom or Teams audio recording, in which data could be recorded. Also, the use of voice recorder and scant notes were utilized and collected from the interviews, to examine the themes in the content to combat any researcher's bias that would jeopardize my study's objectivity. This included the use of journals for collection, in case any of my participants utilized "journaling" as a method of documentation or coping mechanism and volunteered to the researcher such writings to share. By carefully transcribing the entire conversation, including gaps and brief remarks, trustworthiness was sought a small number of field notes shall be taken during interviews to record the interview's specifics later, increasing reliability. Continuous evaluation of the goals, justification for the type of study, data collection methods, and findings improves the validity (Ferrario & Stantcheva, 2022). In addition to purposefully pursuing a

sample that may have been left out in earlier studies on my research topic, efforts shall be taken to maintain the reliability of the data by examining divergent viewpoints and considering contradicting views emerging in the data. Data analysis followed these five steps:

Step 1: Organizing and Preparing the Data:

Step 2: Reading Data

Step 3: Coding the Data Code

Step 4: Generating Themes

Step 5: Interpreting the Meaning of Themes Meaning

After collection, transcription, and organization of data, thematic coding was used to determine trends and themes. Thematic coding is when a “qualitative researcher studies events in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Lochmiller, 2021, pg. 2031). Next, inductive and deductive-themed coding was used during my analysis to help with organization.”

Belotto (2018) states,

Deductive thematic coding is a qualitative data analysis technique that involves applying pre-existing categories or theoretical frameworks to analyze a dataset. Unlike inductive coding, which allows themes to emerge from the data, deductive coding starts with predetermined themes or codes based on existing theories or research questions. Inductive thematic coding is a qualitative data analysis technique used to

identify and categorize themes or patterns in a dataset without preconceived categories or theoretical frameworks. (p.13)

To complete this coding the online program NVivo was used to help organize and analyze non-numerical or unstructured data. NVivo is a software program used to analyze qualitative data. NVivo, in this case, was used to analyze data from my participants' interviews (Yeager, 2023). The NVivo program provided themes making it easy to analyze the results obtained from the interviews. Manual coding was also used to analyze data, which allowed for hands-on familiarity. This also made it easy for the researcher to manually obtain additional themes from the transcripts without entirely relying on NVivo to generate themes. NVivo specifically helps qualitative researchers organize, analyze, and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, journal articles, social media, and web content (Lumivero, 2024). With the themes prepared, I could then analyze any trends from the participant's experiences and interpret raw data collected from the field. With an integration of already available literature, the results obtained can be justified and used in the future as a reference to all Black students and those of minority groups. The themes obtained from both the NVivo program and manual editing were put in major groups using sticky notes of different colors. This was to offer further clarifications and organization for the results.

Qualitative Research and Trustworthiness

Qualitative research has a negative reputation for lacking trusted and valid data because most study topics selected are personal topic of the researcher (Tracy, 2010). Because of this variable, the study can be biased and full of subjectivity from the researcher. For my research, specifically, subjectivity was an apparent weakness, and I knew I needed to recognize this immediately. Mwita (2021) states most qualitative research topics were subject to identifying

personal themes which left open the researcher's personal interpretations. Tracy (2010) states good qualitative research is relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative. There are "Eight Criteria" to help create and provide trusty qualitative research. Researchers must meet the eight criteria; however, because of the topic and sensitivity, there are two of them that will help exceed the study's trustworthiness. The topic for this study is currently worthy of research and development. Worthy topics often emerge from disciplinary priorities and, therefore, are theoretically or conceptually compelling. As stated previously, the United States is experiencing a racial movement negatively impacting Black society and Black students in general more than ever. Black Students around the country are experiencing racial acts of violence on predominately white campuses every day. Kansas State University, on May 5th, 2017, found itself the home of an unwelcoming display of racism on their very campus. Students found a noose made of rope hanging from a tree while walking on campus. A noose for Black America symbolizes a "hanging of a Black person" for display to white people and to intimidate Black people (Schultz, 2022). When this Act of Racism occurred, Black students specifically were left feeling afraid and scared. This display of racism showed ignorance and intolerance which also left Black students displaced on campus because of fear of violence and hate. Rigor is also important for a credible and impactful study. Tracy (2010) also states for a research study to be "rich in rigor" various practices serving as the means to achieve such rigor. The researcher will recruit six participants for this study. However, I do recognize the bigger the sample size, the more data and opportunity for reliability and validity which helps credibility. The researcher will interview each participant two times to increase validity and credibility. Each interview will last 45-60 minutes and will have more than two weeks in between each interview. This will help minimize memory lapses while validating experiences through narrative repetition. Next, the

sample for this study was appropriate for the goals of the study. The sample will consist of only Black students currently enrolled at a large midwestern university. Interviews will be conducted in-person or online by Zoom or Teams.

Potential Weaknesses

One potential weakness of this study was the potential for social desirability bias. Social desirability bias refers to participants' tendency to respond in a way the researcher believes is socially acceptable or aligns with societal norms (Grimm, 2010). In the context of studying white fragility and racism, participants may be hesitant to admit or discuss their own biases or complicity in perpetuating racial inequality and inequity. This bias can lead to participants downplaying or denying their involvement in racist behaviors or beliefs, which can limit the accuracy and depth of the data collected. It could also result in a skewed representation of the extent and impact of white fragility and racism within the study population (Randall & Fernandes, 2012).

Another potential weakness was memory biases. When participants have memory biases it affects their ability to accurately recall and recount specific incidents or details. Memory biases, such as selective memory or distortion, can impact the reliability and accuracy of the information shared during the interview. The misunderstanding of the power dynamics during the interview could also cause weakness during the study. The researcher could influence the participant's willingness to openly discuss their experiences due to the fear of judgement or consequences of sharing experiences the researcher may be aware of. This could then cause the participants to feel intimidated or hesitant to share their true thoughts and feelings.

Lastly, emotional distress in recalling negative experiences can be emotionally draining and stressful for participants. Participants may feel anger, frustration, sadness, or anxiety when

discussing these sensitive topics. This emotional distress can affect their ability to articulate their experiences clearly or may lead to emotional breakdowns during the interview. The researcher monitored all behaviors carefully so that if needed, the interview would be concluded to allow the participant time to rest or end the interview the day.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher provided the methodological framework for the research study. The researcher discussed how each participant was recruited and the process that entailed. The researcher also discussed in this chapter each method and how data was gathered and organized. Next, the researcher discussed the weaknesses and strengths of this research study. In the upcoming chapters researcher will discuss the actual data from the interviews and the themes and experiences that resulted from the interviews.

Chapter 4 - Results

The purpose of this study is to understand how white fragility impacts Black students and their self-authenticity in college and post-graduation. The primary research questions for this study are:

1. What is “authenticity” and “leadership” for Black students at predominately white institutions?
2. How does the historical and social cultural experiences of Black Students’ impact their authenticity and overall academic journey?
3. What would be the ideal learning environment for Black students in predominantly white schools, to help navigate white fragility and its effects?

Themes and Experiences of Participants

To help understand this research and the outcomes, it is important to understand the participants. Each participant shared a collective passion to express their experiences as a Black student at a large midwestern university with the hope of my research shedding light on the issues and challenges Black students at a predominately white institutions deal with. Each participant visibly showed strong emotions of sadness and anxiety as we began to work through the research questions. The researcher did recognize the importance of patience and empathy, so there were many opportunities to take a break. Each participant shared that the excitement prior to starting K-State quickly diminished as they began to experience discrimination, inequality, and racism.

Each participant shared experiences that illuminated the impact of being discriminated against. The impact racial acts had on their grades and socialization while attending a large

midwestern university. The analysis revealed four themes: white fragility, racial exclusion, struggles for authenticity, and barriers to leadership, providing a deeper understanding of how systemic biases shape their educational experiences. Below are detailed explanations and meanings of each theme followed by actual participant experiences in relation to each theme.

Impact of White Fragility on Black Students' Experiences

This theme accounts for how each participant felt overall while attending a PWI. Because of white fragility, each participant felt their academic journey as a college student would be stressful and traumatic. The result of each participant's feelings this way was they were unsure if they would successfully make it to graduation. Each participant shared a time when they were sitting in a predominately white class, and they witnessed a white student visibly uncomfortable because of the expressions and underlying comments that were made. When white students' display discomfort, Black students also feel uncomfortable which leads to minimal participation from the Black students with the other classmates and instructor. These effects were not only felt in the classroom but also during campus meetings where interactions with white students' or staff were necessary. Participants also shared stories about beginning their day with feelings of anxiety and fear because of the upcoming interactions with white students and staff that would require constant "code-switching" in order to make white staff and students feel comfortable. All of this prep work resulted in each participant feeling exhausted and overwhelmed before they even stepped foot in class.

Racial Exclusion and Social Isolation

Participants shared stories and experiences about racial exclusion and social isolation because of white fragility. Participants felt they could not trust or rely on white students and staff or even some Black students when they were mistreated in the classroom or during campus meetings. Because some Black students expressed that they were not willing to vocalize their mistreatment by white staff and students, Black students who engaged in racial activism felt isolated, especially in the classroom with other Black students who felt that way. Also, my participants found it difficult to participate in campus organizations because of the lack of diversity within campus organizations. Participants shared moments when they wanted to get involved in organizations like the Student Government Association (SGA), but they felt uncomfortable because not only were they the only Black members but the ideologies and beliefs of the white students, did not align with theirs. Participants also felt socially isolated due to the lack of social movements that supported Black students dealing with mistreatment from white students and staff. Participants felt these challenges would not warrant help from the university or a specific campus organization that would typically offer support. Because of these feelings of exclusion and isolation, each participant went through depression and experienced fear at some moment during their academic career.

Struggle for Authenticity

Participants felt like they could not be their authentic versions of themselves in the classroom or while participating in campus organizations or meetings. Participants shared on many occasions they wanted to wear attire that expressed phrases in support of the Black community and empowerment. Participants wanted to wear their hair in different hairstyles that showed support for their culture or just creativity. Participants knew that this display of

authenticity would result in white students feeling discomfort which then would lead to confrontation or isolation for the participant. Participants shared that it was easier to not express themselves in order to avoid conflict.

Leadership and Participation Barriers

Participants shared it was difficult being in leadership roles because of the expectations from white staff and students. Participants were told to not speak on inequities and inequalities Black students endured while at their university. Participants also felt that any racial movements that would result in change had to be “watered” down so that white students and staff would not be offended. The harsh reality of Black students and what they deal with daily was too much to accept, and was told would only cause division within the classroom. If the Participant disregarded the warning to not engage in rhetoric that could cause divisiveness, barriers would then be put in place to either discourage future racial activism or systemic barriers that would cause removal from leadership position. There have been occasions at predominately white institutions that Black students were threatened, terrorized or even unalive because of racial activism. Participants feared this type of activism was not worth the confrontation and were told to focus on their long-term goal which was to graduate.

Each of these themes below are summarized in relation to research questions.

Theme 1: *Impact of White Fragility on Black Students’ Experiences*

This first theme responds to the research question: *What is “authenticity” and “leadership” for Black students at predominantly white institutions?* Through the interviews, participants consistently highlighted how **white fragility** affected their academic and social experiences at Kansas State University. Participants shared instances where white students or

faculty exhibited discomfort or defensiveness when confronted with the realities of being a Black student.

- **Participant 1** recalled feeling that their white classmates were “uncomfortable” with their participation, which in turn impacted their grades:

“Me participating makes them uncomfortable which equals a bad grade for me.”

- **Participant 2** shared that they felt the need to “change [their] voice and attire” to avoid making white students and faculty uncomfortable:

“I had to change my voice and attire to fit in or the white students and faculty would feel scared.”

This theme illustrates how white fragility forces Black students to engage in **self-regulation and code-switching**, undermining their ability to fully participate in academic life.

The next two themes respond to the research question: *“What would be the ideal learning environment for Black students in predominately white schools, to help navigate white fragility and its effects?”*

Theme 2: Racial Exclusion and Social Isolation

Another common theme was **social and racial exclusion**, where participants felt isolated from their peers, both Black and white. Participants expressed feelings like outsiders within the university's predominantly white setting.

- **Participant 1** mentioned feeling excluded both from their white and Black peers, leading to a sense of not fully belonging:

“I do not feel Black enough for [other Black students]. I fit in better with the white kids but still feel like an outsider.”

- **Participant 3** described instances of being physically excluded in settings like the campus cafeteria, where white students would occupy all the seats, making it clear Black students were not welcome:

“I grabbed my tray and left. The Black students were downstairs, separate from the white students.”

This theme shows how exclusion was both **social and physical**, contributing to a broader sense of alienation for Black students at the university.

Theme 3: Struggle for Authenticity

A major recurring theme was the **struggle for authenticity**, where participants discussed feeling the need to suppress or alter their behavior to fit into the predominantly white environment. Many participants expressed being their true selves was seen as a threat or discomfort to white students and staff.

- **Participant 1** reflected on the pressure to change their behavior and how it led to a lack of authenticity in their university life:

“I must put on an act in the classroom so that the white students and staff feel comfortable. I do not feel myself.”

- **Participant 2** discussed how **white fragility**, and institutional norms restricted their ability to be authentic:

“The white students and staff feel uncomfortable. Which makes me feel uncomfortable and worry if my coursework would be graded fairly.”

The **struggle for authenticity** is a critical theme, as it underscores the emotional labor Black students must perform to navigate predominantly white spaces while suppressing their true identities.

Theme 4: Leadership and Participation Barriers

This final theme responds to the research question: “*How does historical and social cultural experiences of Black Students impact their authenticity and overall academic journey?*”

Participants shared experiences of feeling uncomfortable in **leadership roles** or being reluctant to engage fully because of the racial dynamics within the university.

- **Participant 1** expressed a reluctance to take on leadership roles, feeling white students would not respect them:

“I do not feel comfortable leading white students because we do not communicate the same. I would eventually end up falling back.”

- **Participant 3**, who is older than the typical student, also felt excluded from leadership opportunities and stated age, coupled with race, created barriers to participation:

“White students and Black students assume I am a teacher, so they don’t ask [me to participate].”

The above barriers indicate how **institutional racism** and ageism combined to limit opportunities for leadership and engagement, leaving participants feeling marginalized within academic and social setting. Participants felt their academic classes or extracurricular activities lacked diversity which inhibited their ability to be authentic.

While interviewing participants and analyzing data, sub- themes surfaced that illustrated participation barriers and ways Black students were hindered during their academic journey including:

1. Faculty and staff did not attempt to communicate with Black students
2. Victims of racial discrimination by staff, fellow student, fellow colleague, or faculty.

3. Participants felt like they could not be authentic in their daily interactions with white counterparts in comparison to any other student not Black or of persons of color.

Also, three avenues were emphasized as potential improvements for predominantly white institutions. The following are:

1. Fix systems constructed for white students not Black.
2. Input laws and practices promoting authenticity and leadership benefits Black students
3. Initiative for Black students to decrease the risk of being victims of discrimination, racism, or abuse.

Participant Narratives and Profiles

The following section provides participant profiles and narratives derived from the interviews. A full list of interview questions and responses are also provided (see Appendix C and Appendix G). To maintain the confidentiality of each participant, their identities are labeled as Participants 00000, 11111, 22222, 33333, 44444, 55555.

Participant 00000

Participant 00000 is a sophomore currently enrolled full-time. 00000 is twenty years of age and a first-generation student. 00000 also comes from an overall lower class working family. 00000 is not local to Manhattan but lives in an overall Black community and attended mostly predominantly Black schools prior to starting K-State. Participant 00000 also currently has lived in the dorms on-campus that are predominantly white as well.

Before our first interview, Participant 00000 seemed eager to share their experiences as a student. I noted Participant 00000 brought their personal journal to refer to regarding experiences they have had as a student. When I asked Participant 00000 why they brought their personal journal, they replied it was a way to cope and manage their overall life. Participant 00000 noted

they suffer from anxiety and depression have tried to visit the Lafene to see a counselor and/or therapist but because excessive wait times or lack of flexibility of counselors with time and schedules, they have not had the opportunity to meet with a counselor at that time. Participant also noted never having met with a counselor, so this would have been their first time having an outlet to speak to someone regarding their personal issues outside of family and friends.

I began the interview with **Participant 00000** by asking question number one.

Researcher asked: “Tell me about your experiences as a Black Student?”

Participant 00000 stated:

When I began KSU I was very scared. I was not used to seeing so many White people and to be constantly surrounded by them, everywhere that I went was new. In general, my experiences with most of moments have been okay. Well, let me go back. I would say that my experiences in less formal times are okay. I do feel uncomfortable in situations where I must talk with large groups of white people, I mean students and it is only me. But yes, in general they have been okay.

The researcher than asked Participant 00000 if there were any specific times they could think of where they experienced racism?

Participant 00000 stated:

I have been in situation where I felt like I was not wanted. I am currently a member of an excessively large group on campus that has like only 2 people of color. One being Asian and the other myself, Black. We sit together because it just feels weird. People say hi but they do not really talk to us like we are friends or something. There have been times when I tried to ask a question or offer advice, and I was never called on. I do think the person did not see me, but you would think they would notice my hand. When I first

joined, I was asked why I joined, and I thought that was weird. Like, I joined for the same reason as you.

The researcher asked Participant 00000 if they had any of these experiences within the classroom?

Participant 00000 stated:

I do not like classes here. Everything is for them. I have bad anxiety so when I enroll in classes I try to find classes that will have other Black students in it. I feel so alone in most of my classes. I am currently taking a sociology class, and the professor is so rude. I sent them an email to meet regarding a grade on my assignment and they said we could meet but they would not change anything. They continued to say that standards are for everyone, and I would not get any special treatment. I did not even ask for anything, I just wanted to discuss my grade. I could tell that this person had a problem with me. My other classmate that is Hispanic also told me their experiences with this person has been bad.

Oh, they also put all the minority people at one table. Like, how obvious is that.

Researcher asked Participant 00000 if they feel they could be their “authentic selves” in the classroom or organization/club. Researcher noted Participant 00000 giggled a little under their breathe and replied with the question “authentic?”

Participant 00000 stated:

Authentic? White people fear me. I can see it in their eyes that they judge me as soon as they see me. As a tall, heavy set, Black male I am used to it though. I always talk like them. If I use my normal voice which is low, they act like they cannot understand what I am saying. Like I am speaking a different language or something. I will never dress like them though. They can call or assume what they want about me, but I am not taking off

my J's. Oh, this one time, it was my first year I was sitting in an English, or some writing class and I was sitting next to an open seat. Class had started but this blonde, white girl was running late. She walked right to the open seat to sit down until she saw me next to her and changed her mind. She walked all the way to the front to find a different seat so that she did not sit next to me. That is something that happens all the time. It is okay though. But no, I know to be on time to class so that I do not get judged as being a typical late Black person. I know that I cannot wear certain smells because they assume I am covering up weed or something. Honestly, ma'am, if I were to be myself, White people would not accept me.

Researcher asked Participant 00000: "Why did they feel that way?"

Participant 00000 stated:

Because they deep down hate us and are jealous of us. Why else would continue to change us?

Researcher asked Participant 00000: "Did you feel you had the same opportunities in the classroom as your white counterparts?"

Participant 00000 stated:

I mean, we all get the same assignments, but I do not feel like I get the same support and help. I do not feel comfortable asking questions because I sound like I am stupid and not getting it. But they do not really ask either. I do hope to take classes that I want for my senior year which may help. Many of my classes are required now, so they are boring. But even so they are mostly white. I am not as comfortable as the others but what can I do?

Researcher asked Participant 00000: “Have you participated in or witnessed any situations that made you feel like you would get in trouble for dressing, talking, walking, speaking in your authentic self?”

Participant 00000 stated:

Yes. I feel like if I wore my shirts that said certain things that support Black culture, I would make them uncomfortable. I was asked by a white girl why my hair was braided. She tried to touch my hair also. They have no boundaries or respect. The organization that I am in (for now) said that I cannot wear certain colors or prints. However, I see all the time white students wearing whatever they want. Wearing workouts pants and stuff is okay for the white girls but if I wear jeans and J’s they ask me to wear khaki. Sometimes it seems like they do not even try to hide it.

Participant 11111

Participant 11111 is a 22-year-old senior student. They come from a background of middle-class family. Participant noted to the researcher that they were adopted by a white family when they were 8 years of age. They stated that their biological parents were killed in a wreck and that they did not have any family members that could take them or their siblings. 11111 noted to the researcher that their parents did not give them any other option but to attend a large midwestern university (Birks & Mills, 2011). This was because of the cost, location and family tradition of family attending KSU. Participant 11111 also stated that they also were not given the option of living on-campus or with a roommate outside of his home with his parents.

Researcher would like to note Participant 11111 appeared noticeably quiet and anxious. Researcher also noted Participant 11111 continued to ask questions prior to beginning the interview. The researcher reassured Participant 11111 that all information documented within the

interview will be shared but their identity as the participant will remain anonymous. I also reminded 11111 their family will not have access to my notes, voice recording, unless they choose to share. Participant 11111 stated they did not want to share our interview they would like everything shared to remain anonymous (Blinder & Krueger, 2013). The researcher agreed.

Researcher asked Participant 11111, “Please tell me about your experiences as a Black Student attending a large midwestern university?”

Participant 11111 stated:

I wish I never attended this school. I have no experiences that would count as good. Is that, ok?” Researcher stated that is was fine. Participant 11111 continued to say that “on many occasions I wanted to quit and move out of my parents’ house. I feel surrounded by “whiteness” all day, every day. I am happy to be graduating and getting out of here and my parents’ house. Sorry, you asked about my experience at K-State. I guess I can say that it has been okay. I fit in better with the white kids then I do with other Black Students. I do not feel Black enough for them. I have been told I sound and act white. When I am with my white friends I still feel like an outsider and confused. I may sound like them, but I still feel like a Black person. They make jokes about eating chicken or smoking weed as if I have experience in doing these things. But they joke about it like it is just a joke and that I am being sensitive. Honestly, that is not where I come from. When I am around Black students, they assume I am boogie or come from a rich family and that I cannot relate. I feel lost and unwelcome everywhere.

Researcher then asked Participant 11111: “What is it that separates you from his Black culture?”

Participant 11111 stated:

I feel weird. I do not eat Black foods or comforts that most Black people talk about. I honestly do not understand much of what is considered Black culture. All I know is I get treated badly for my dark skins and voice by both races.

Participant 22222

Participant 22222 is currently enrolled as an undergraduate. They come from a family of extreme poverty and disconnect. They are a first-generation student to receive a higher education; however, they are not the first to graduate. Participant 22222 is 64 years old and has been trying to get their degree since 1985. 22222 provided an incredibly unique and long, rich history to Kansas State and their history with Black students and equality (Buchanan & Alexander, 2019).

Researcher asked Participant 2222: “Please tell me about your experiences at Kansas State.

Participant 22222 stated:

My experiences go back to before you were born young lady. I have witnessed Black students yelled out, mocked, and attacked. That was because they simply attended a class or simply tried to eat lunch. You may not recall this, but the union used to be set up like a buffet style lunch area. No restaurants or groceries, only cafeteria styled settings. I remember walking into the union one day and a white girl calling me fat. She did not hesitate or fear consequences. She simply looked me in my face while walking by and called me fat. Take it, this was one of the very first times eating at the union so I was not sure this was something I should do. The closer I got to the eating area; I noticed something right away. There were no students of color. I mean, not one. I looked around

and there were tables and tables of white students some Asian, but no Black students. I told myself to turn around, but I kept going. Walking up to the first area to grab a tray, I remember a white boy looking at me like I was not supposed to be there. I do not know but my mind and eyes started to stray, and I noticed lots of white students looking at me funny. Even though I experienced this discomfort, I kept moving forward. Honestly, by the time I grabbed a sandwich, milk carton and some fruit, I did not even want to eat it. The experience was what I wanted to finish. Of course, as I walked to find a seat, there was not one. Or let me be clear, one that did not have a bookbag or “taken” look attached to it. How does this happen? Where are all the Black and brown students? I grabbed my tray and left. It was not until then I noticed the Black students and Brown students were downstairs. Separate from the White students.

Researcher asked 22222: “What were your experiences within the classroom while trying to the authentic version of yourself?”

Participant 22222 stated:

Though the objective was to learn equally, we were separate within the classroom as well. Black students sat with Black students and white students sat with white students. I did not experience a Black faculty or staff until recently as a student. Back then every class or laboratory was filled with white staff. I never felt comfortable in class and neither did my friends. We experienced looks and words or name calling that would make a student today call the authorities. White faculty ignored the chants and rants. Yet they expected us to do the same work as them. They did not understand my plight or my journey. They were too busy making sure that I was not causing issues.

Researcher asked Participant 22222: “Do you recall any Black leadership or movements within the classroom? How did you channel your authenticity as a student, specifically a Black student.”

Participant 22222 stated:

We had groups or people that we hung up with but leadership positions within the class or organization were nonexistent. I do not think we honestly wanted to run for any of the student organizations. These groups were not intended for Black students or to help further our experiences. I remember sitting in class my first semester and the teacher (who was white) did not really acknowledge I was there. Of course, I stood up in my best white voice that I could mimic and asked where resuscitation was located. She immediately told me to look at the sheets in the hall. However, when a white boy stood up and asked a question that was like mine, she answered. Authenticity or being “negro” was not something we shared with white students. They already assumed so many things about us that it was best to present the version of ourselves they assumed we were in their heads. I mean, we did not do anything but steal according to them. We were bastard children that needed to meet the quota for school. You know what, even though I felt so little in these spaces, I knew my family was depending on me to change our circumstances. I come from a large family. 11 children, 9 boys and 2 girls. All the boys were working jobs, and my sister was on the spectrum. My dad would tell me, it was my responsibility to make things right. How do you do that? I could barely get financial aid or scholarships. Working and going to school was cut short because me getting pregnant and needing to take a break. Of course, for the family this was disappointing, but I promised myself I would return. Well, I did. 5 times exactly.

Researcher asked 22222: “If you could change anything about your time as a student at the university, what would it be?”

Participant 22222 stated:

Leadership and authenticity did not go one by one back then. You could not do both and be successful. White folks did not want to see who we really were and what that looked like. Yes, I wore clothing that fit in but if I wore anything that showed expression or change, we were harassed by staff and white students.

Participant 33333

Participant 33333 is a 21-year-old junior. 33333 comes from a background of poverty. 33333 is also a first-generation student from out of the state. Participant 33333 received a scholarship to play sports for the university. Researcher wants to note Participant 33333 continually asked if information shared within our interviews would be confidential and anonymous no matter what because fear or retaliation or removal from their sport. Researcher reassured Participant 33333 all and any information obtained would be only identified by their five-digit numeric and that I would be the only person with access to their information. Participant 33333 agreed to continue but again wanted to make that their anonymity remained (Bucholtz, 2019).

Researcher asked 33333: “Describe your overall experiences at the university.

Participant 33333 stated:

As an athlete I feel like I work for the man. Competition is tough but competing with white students and their money and rich parents is something different. Coaches always preach teamwork and brotherhood/sisterhood, but they leave out the part that states, unless you are Black. Black athletes are pulled back and forth between what is right and

what is needed. It is exceedingly difficult dealing with racism and/or racial acts because as an athlete we know that if we did not serve an expensive purpose, we would not be where we are. It is hard hearing fellow Black students deal with discrimination and racism. You want to protest and not play but in the back of our minds we know they will replace us, especially if we are not starters.

Researcher asked 33333: “Do you feel like you can be authentic with members of the team/staff?”

Participant 33333 stated:

No! We are expected to mirror the white students even if we disagree. We are expected to socialize like them, dress like them and especially respond like them. I come from a family of activists so once I began to unintentionally show these changes, my family noticed. They started to tell me I sounded like a white person. It is not something you do on purpose, it just happens.

Participant 44444

Participant 44444 is a 20-year-old senior. They are the first generation on both maternal and paternal sides of their family. Attending K-State was considered a dream of theirs because of the amount of family members that have only attended junior colleges or technical colleges. They would be the first person within their family to complete their education at a university filled with multiple opportunities and perspectives post-graduation. Researcher would like to note that Participant 44444 was intentional on the attire that they wore to each interview. I could tell as the researcher that this interview and the purpose had motivated this student to begin expressing themselves even if it were not an anonymous interview (Caldera, 2020).

Researcher asked Participant 44444: “Describe any experiences with white faculty, staff or students that made you feel like you were unable to learn, participate or share verbally like the white students in your class?”

Participant 44444 stated:

Yeah, it was interesting because when I was a sophomore, we were asked to do a project about our family tree or something and to focus on our father figures. I do not know my father or anything about him. Of course, the stigma that Black kids do not have their fathers would be unintentionally shown. I refused to do that project because I was the only Black student in the class, and I was also the only student that did not have a relationship with their father. Of course, my professors asked me if I had a grandfather, and I stated yes but that I did not know them either. She told me to figure it out so that I could get points. I just dropped the course. To me this was the start of many problems down the line.

Participant 55555

Participant 55555 is a 19-year-old junior. They come from an exceptionally large family with multiple generations of educators. Participant 55555 noted their family was not poor but did struggle to pay for education and they had to depend on financial assistance (Canty, 2022). Participant 55555 also stated they believed this large midwestern university was built on “blood” and it is about time someone begins to look at all the blood that has been spilled and not just Native Americans. Participant 55555 continued to say that they were happy to participate in the research and that they had no problem sharing their identity. I reminded Participant 55555 I would not be sharing any of their information and their protection and continued equality within their education was top priority for myself and my committee as we work through my research.

They understood. Researcher would like to note Participant 55555 was upset or disgruntled during both interviews (Cardwell, 2019). The researcher could tell this was very personal and they were desperate to share their experiences and hear about reactions or implications from my research.

Researcher asked Participant 55555: “Describe the racial balance of students at K-State?”

What comes to mind?

Participant 5555 stated:

Our university is very lopsided. Do you think they realize it? What comes to mind is just simply walking around campus. Walking into the Union or different buildings. You must search for Black students. Even if you go to Aggieville, you do not see Black students. It is like we are hiding. You talked about authenticity and if I ever feel authentic. How could I with people that see me or my struggle. My authenticity sounds like another story of begging. It is like they do not understand that where most Black students come from, we had no choice. We used the hand we were dealt. Most of the time that was poverty, depression, and self-reliance on us. I come from an exceptionally large family. Most of the time, we took care of our siblings.

Themes from the interviews illustrate how white fragility, racial exclusion, struggles for authenticity, and leadership barriers significantly affected the experiences of Black students at a large midwestern university. These challenges manifest in both academic and social contexts, limiting opportunities for authentic self-expression and engagement. The participants’ reflections suggest that institutional changes are necessary to create a more inclusive environment that values and supports the authentic identities of Black students.

In analyzing the interviews, several themes emerged, which reflect the challenges faced by Black students in a predominantly white institution. The data show experiences with white fragility, racial exclusion, and leadership barriers are common, leading to feelings of inauthenticity and social isolation. These challenges intersect in ways hindering both academic success and personal well-being for Black students.

As a reminder, here are the research questions that guided my study:

1. What is “authenticity” and “leadership” for Black students at predominately white institutions?
2. How does the historical and social cultural experiences of Black Students’ impact their authenticity and overall academic journey?”
3. What would be the ideal learning environment for Black students in predominantly white schools, to help navigate white fragility and its effects?

Here are also four Participant Experiences that surfaced while conducting the interviews:

1. Lack of diversity with academic classes or campus organizations
2. Lack of communication and relationship building opportunities
3. Victim of racism and/or discrimination
4. Inability to be authentic and honest through their academic journey

Below are the experiences followed by participant narratives.

Participant Experiences

Experience 1: *Participants felt like they could not be authentic in their daily interactions with white counterparts in comparison to any other student that was not Black or of persons of color.*

For any students to be successful within education, they must feel comfortable in their interactions with staff and students (Burke, 2020). Statistics show students that feel ostracized or unwelcome in the classroom or within groups or organizations tend to not be successful. Each participant was extremely specific regarding their experiences with white students and how being authentic was not and has never been an option for them.

Participant 11111 stated:

I am totally used to not presenting the real version of myself. I know that because of my sex and my overall look, I can frighten white girls. Even though I have never committed a crime in my life, it is the assumption that I am a criminal. Sitting in my classes, I usually sit in the back away from all the chatter. Usually there is one other minority in the class. We typically make eye contact a few times throughout the semester and work together if ever asked to work in a group. Being authentic has never gotten me anything from white people but glares and stares. They do not want to hear our “slang” or just not high voices like their own. White people fear the truth and the truth is we scare them.

Participant 22222 stated:

White fragility is real. I have sat in classes and listen to them try to validate racism or acts of racism, especially when we talk about recent events like Trayvon Martin as an example. How can you accept murdering a kid because he ‘looked suspicious?’ Why

don't we hear about white kids getting gunned down for caring candy and drinks? White people will never understand our plight because they are the constructionist of the plights. I have seen white kids get defensive when it comes to equality conversations too. It is a fact that Black students do not get the same treatment as white students. To say that times have changes is just ridiculous. Anytime I have pushed back on these "alleged" equity and equality that exist for all, they get defensive and right out mad. It is always something the Black student did to provoke the reaction."

Participant 33333 stated:

If I dressed like I wanted to dress and walked like I wanted to walk, I would get judged as a thug or nuisance. I know that wearing certain clothes and colors will cause a disruption. I know not speak badly about white police officers or white people in front of white people because they will get uncomfortable. White people live in a world that is imaginary.

Participant 44444 stated:

I try to be the person that I am comfortable being. However, there are times where it seems like white people just do not try to understand my cultural. They want to touch my hair or ask very intrusive questions that a person would not typically ask anyone no matter what race. But that goes back to them feeling entitled to do that. I know that any time I am in a leadership position with white students, I must change my voice and ton. I cannot treat them like I would other Black people in a group.

Participant 55555 stated:

I have had times where I could be myself and not feel bad about it. However, that was only with other Black students, or most students were Black. It is weird because I cannot count on one hand how many times, I have been chosen last for group projects or forced to be a part of all Black group because I knew I was not going to be accepted.

Experience 2: *Lack of Communication and Relationship Building Opportunities with Staff and Students*

Burke (2020) states that communication is the key to building relationships in any context. Throughout the interviews, all participants shared how faculty/staff and white students made truly little attempts to build relationship with them. Any student or staff that joins an organization or group and lacks communication will feel hindered and alone during the process (Burke, 2020).

Pewewardy & Frey (2002) also state students that feel comfortable talking and sharing their experiences with fellow students or staff are more likely to be successful. Each of my participants shared on many attempts they tried to build or form an academic relationship with either a staff member or classmate and were denied all together or made to feel uncomfortable. I would like to note all my participants noted it was difficult in general approaching this topic of bridging communication gaps with staff or students so to be treated negatively had a lasting impact on their tenure as a student and upcoming opportunities.

Building relationships and establishing communication can be difficult for Black students (Wingfield & Alston, 2020). Black students do not feel they can be authentic in their quest and must mirror the behavior or actions of their fellow white students (Albert & Valda, 2009).

Participant 33333 stated:

Speaking up regarding how I felt was not something Black students would do during that time. We barely wanted to be seen, so heard was out of the question. There were many times I asked my teacher a question that he or she refused to answer but later to find out a white classmate asked the same question and was afforded an answer.

Participants continued to say they did not feel comfortable meeting with staff within the class and were not sure how comfortable they would be setting up a time outside of this space.

Participant 55555 stated:

My authenticity has never been truly accepted by white people. I do not look like them and I do not sound like them. I refuse to change who I am to meet their comfort. If I ask to meet with you in you, why does it feel like I am asking to move mountains? It has always felt weird that before I met with staff or classmates, like in groups or something I knew I had to change my looks. What am I wearing or how is my hair styled? This non-verbal communication annoys me the most. It is like they are expecting me to conform to them.

All my participants stated the lack of diversified campus organizations or classrooms contributed to their minimal ability to successfully build relationships with their white counterparts. Many felt that even if there were organizations were intentional about addressing the “segregation” between white students and students of color in general the purpose would be “watered down.” Watered down mean, “not truly addressing all the issues below the surfaces to cater to their “white fragility.”

Experience 3: *Each Participant has been a Victim of Racism or Discrimination*

This part of the interviews was the most difficult. To hear how participants had overcome acts of racism or blatantly discrimination was heart wrenching. To hear they would not be able to experience their academic journey without feeling was difficult. During these moments of the interview tears were shed and clarity, understanding and reflection were needed. The question was asked how anyone could expect Black students to be authentic when they feel uncomfortable walking outside. And that there was a possibility they could become a victim of a white person's ignorance and demand of superiority.

As the researcher, I noticed once we began talking about these experiences, anger and disdain immediately became apparent. As the researcher, I had to ask myself how does a student or anyone show up to class or group feeling so much pain and then expected to be successful.

Participant 44444 stated:

I remember walking on campus, it was early in the morning, and I was headed to the chow hall for breakfast. I was still dressed in my pajamas because I had every intention to go back to my room and go back to sleep. I heard very faintly from behind me someone say, "dirty nigger." I honestly did not think that is what I heard. I thought I was imagining this. I looked behind me and this group of white boys, about three if I can remember said it again. "Dirty nigger." I was not scared but I was not ready to fight with these two pricks. I mean, I already knew what was going to be said. As a Black person, they get the benefit of the doubt. They get the "our word against mine" benefit. I continued to the chow hall where it initially seemed like they were going as well. I will never forget how small they made me feel. I was reminded that I am Black and that I am nothing but a "dirty nigger" in their minds.

Participant 11111 stated:

Yeah, when are we not treated like second class citizens. I mean, this is a PWI right? You would think that in the year of 2024 every student could wake up and be treated fairly and equally like white people. I was having issues with my financial aid and needed to talk to my advisor. I did not set an appointment because I did not really think about it. So, I had some free time that morning and I just decided to stop by. I had already seen several fines pop up on my account, so I needed to work this out now. What was the issue, I do not really remember. I do remember though how she treated me when she came from behind wherever she was. I walked into the office, and it was a student worker. I told her there was something holding up my financial aid and if she could look at it. She pulled up my account and said that I would need to talk to my financial advisor. I asked if she was available now. She said she would go back and see. The student worker returned within a few minutes and asked me to have a seat that my advisor would be out in a few minutes. A few minutes turned into five, ten, fifteen, twenty. I went back up to the desk and asked if she was still coming to see me. The student worker looked surprised, if not almost confused about my request. She went to the back and returned and told me that my advisor would be right up. About five minutes later, my advisor appeared and asked me to follow her to the back. I sat down and began telling her my problem. I remember her looking away from the computer and clear as day saying to me, “please be quiet, I haven’t asked you a question yet.” I looked at her like, “okay.” She then asked me for my student ID which I did not have at the time. I did have my driver’s license, just not my student ID. She said to me, “so you come here looking for free money but not prepared to do the work. Typical.” I asked her, what did that mean. She said, “nothing, I can’t do

anything with you unless I can verify who you are.” I asked her if my DL would work, and she said no. I need your student ID. I said to her that I have been here over thirty minutes and now you tell me because I do not have my student ID you cannot help me. She then said to me that I needed to watch my tone and understand that she cannot bend the rules for me because I cannot follow directions. I was so mad! I got up and asked her if I could speak to her boss. She stated, yes but you will need to come call back when he is here, and he has gone the rest of the week. I just grabbed my stuff and left. I mean I stormed out of that office. Interestingly, my account was fixed within a couple of days. I wonder if she treats all her students that way or was it because I am Black?

Participant 55555 stated:

I was called a nigger at the football game. I have not been to a football game since then. I was walking through the parking lot full of tailgaters trying to get into the game when I heard someone tailgating say, “look at the nigger.” I mean, really! We talk about family culture here at K-State but all I was doing was walking through the parking lot full of fellow K-Staters celebrating and preparing for the football game. I did not say or do anything. I mean, what could I have done? I continued looking forward. I guess we do not all bleed purple. If you are Black, you bleed “nigger.

Participant 22222 stated:

Racism is like a second identity to me. I have been here a long time. You have asked me about authenticity and if I feel like as a Black student, I am able to feel authentic. Well, how can you do that if you are constantly a victim of racial discrimination? My professor looked at me and called me a “Black person.” He stated that as a “black person” I should understand why violence is prevalent in the Black community. Now, I understand this

was a sociology course but what does my race have to do with violence and certain areas? It was interesting because even the white students in the class thought it was inappropriate. He quickly cleaned it up and tried to say that he was trying to imply that statistically Black communities experience high violence. Keyla, I have been a victim of racism more than I can count on this very campus. Professors, staff, students have all made it clear that I was Black some way or another. I had water thrown at me while I was standing in line to get my books. For some reason, they think because our skin is Black that we are dirty. I have been called “nigger” more times than I can think.

Participant 33333 stated:

There is nothing like making an organization millions of dollars and then feeling like I am not equivalent to the white athletes. I do not know; it is hard to explain. Coaches and staff try and make sure we feel equal or wanted when we are all together. But when we meet individually or have sessions, I feel just like a Black person. During practice last Fall, a fellow athlete and I were in a competition for starting spots. Now, everything about this sport is competition, but this time, scouts were in attendance, and we each wanted play time. During that game, I was given most of the play time. After the game, as we were heading back to our lockers this student said under their breathe, “fucking niggers always win with EEO.” I heard it, other athletes around us heard, even a staff member. Not one person said one thing. They let it go. I told staff and they said, “are you sure that’s what you heard?” Yes, I am sure. Nothing ever came of it, but we had or have tension every time we see one another.

Experience 3: *Lack of Diversity within Academic Classes and Campus Organizations*

During the interviews, one of the overarching themes that developed from my participants narratives was the lack of diversity with academic classes and campus organizations. Alston (2003) states diversity within the classroom builds upon character and integrity for fall. It has also been shown that when classes and organizations lack diversity, they fail to incorporate true learning experiences and authenticity within that space (Brayboy, 2003). Classrooms reflecting diversity have a better opportunity to produce students that are open minded and accepting of others (Alston, 2003). This theme reflects the impact of diversity or the lack thereof in classroom or campus organizations. It was clear as the researcher my participants struggled to be their authentic versions of themselves because of the few Black students in the class or campus organization. Participating as a leader in these spaces was not an option because of differing agendas between white and Black students.

All six of my participants shared how most of their classes beginning with their first course as a first-year student averaged one to two Black students in the class. All my participants stated campus organizations that were not designated for Black or Brown students typically had no Black students as members. All my participants felt like they did not participant within any non-White organizations because they either would not be wanted or would feel unauthentic in their representation as a Black student.

Participant 33333 stated:

I considered one semester running for student government association (SGA), however once I realized that it was one hundred percent run by white students and white staff, I did not feel like I would benefit professionally or personally. They all appeared to run on certain topics and themes that did not fit the Black Student Agenda or need. Black

students are asking for equality and respect and the ability to have our voices heard and white students are asking to have more funding allotted to their fraternities or sororities. All of which, most Black students do not benefit from.

Participant 11111 stated:

When I joined BSU, it was the only place I felt safe and where I could be myself. The other members sounded like me, dressed like heck, even ate the same food that I ate mostly. It is weird because getting to the MCC you get looked at funny just walking up to the building. It is like white students hate that we have a space that is designated from people of color.

Pewewardy & Frey (2002) states students will feel ostracized if they feel unheard and unprotected. Throughout my interviews several of my participants continued to speak about not having a place to go to allow them to be their authentic selves. These spaces are included in the university library Hale. Also, throughout the interviews participants talked about how what space allocated for diversity was continually underfunded or at risk of being closed or removed for the initial purpose.

Participant 44444 stated:

It was clear one semester that we were not going to get the MCC unless we received donations from alumni or some other option. We could not understand why the university would not pay for their students that they claimed to accept, provide a space that felt safe and authentic for us. It was not until we received donations from rich alumni or donors that we were able to get the MCC.

Summary

In summary, the lack of diversity in classrooms or campus organizations impacted the authenticity and leadership of Black students. Each participant shared because of the lack of diversity, they did not participate or volunteer for any organization not predominantly Black. Pewewardy & Frey (2002) state diversity alone brings together the underserved. Chapter Four shared the personal narratives of six Black students at PWIs in comparison to their white classmates. The central issues are related to what constitutes genuine self, leadership, and historical and social-cultural influences on Black students' academic lives. This chapter provides an analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews with six Black students at a large midwestern university. Each participant was interviewed anonymously to prevent retaliation or alienation while attending school. Each participant shared their individual challenges such as discrimination, inequality and racism encountered within the classrooms and campus organization.

Chapter 5 - Discussion, Recommendations and Summary

In Chapter Five I will also summarize my findings and the implications for my work currently and in the future. The primary audience for this research is academics ranging from graduate students to professors, companies vested in improving diversity and equity, and Black students researching white fragility. As mentioned, here are the research questions that guided my study:

1. What is “authenticity” and “leadership” for Black students at predominately white institutions?
2. How does the historical and social cultural experiences of Black Students’ impact their authenticity and overall academic journey?”
3. What would be the ideal learning environment for Black students in predominantly white schools, to help navigate white fragility and its effects?

Also, throughout the interviews, four recommendations to help build better relationships between Black students and Faculty and staff also emerged:

1. Participants recommend academic classes or extracurricular activities be more diverse.
2. Recommend Faculty and staff communicate to help build relationships and bridges for communication.
3. Recommend Faculty recognize most Black students have been a victim of racial discrimination by a staff, fellow student, fellow colleague, or faculty.
4. Recommend Faculty and Staff be authentic in their daily interactions with Black students or any of persons of color.

Throughout each interview, it was clear white fragility is not an imaginary idea and actually affected the outcome and everyday life of Black students and their academic journey as leaders, students and as a human. The coding process and my chosen qualitative method of semi-structured interviews to collect data permitted me to witness real reactions and responses to each question. This theoretical framework helped examine the experiences of Black students and the existence of racial inequality at predominantly white universities found within the classroom. By employing the lenses of social constructivism and symbolic interpretivism, this framework seeks to understand how social interactions, cultural norms, and symbolic meanings shape the experiences of black students within these institutions (Milliken& Schreibe, 2012).

Discussion

Leadership educators every day are met with diversity and equity challenges in the classroom that directly hinder the progress of Black students from experiencing leadership without stress and oppression. Though this task is not easily resolved, white educators must understand the many challenges Black students face while sitting in their classrooms or campus organizations every day. If educators can recognize “white fragility” when it is happening, we could see a change in graduation rates, mental health and an increase in relationship building between white educators and Black students.

If racism is embedded in our thought process and social structures, the ordinary business of society-the routines, practices, and institutions we rely on to do the worlds work-we will keep minorities in subordinate positions. Only aggressive, color-conscious efforts to change the way things will do much to meliorate misery. (Christ, 2017, p. 11)

I wanted my research to voice the challenges and struggles Black students faced during their academic journey. I was intentional in framing each narrative through a critical lens and a social constructionist perspective. The main reason I chose to present my doctoral work on white fragility was because of my own experiences as a student with white staff at a predominately white institution. Even completing my dissertation, I had to monitor my tone and statements to protect the sanctity of institutions and white individuals. However, these interviews provided a voice and a minimal of several examples of white fragility.

Implications and Leadership Interventions

Fix a System Built for White Students not Black Students

Throughout each interview, each participant emphasized systems in place at PWI's that played a significant role in the success of Black students. If a system is built or constructed for the success of a certain group of people or objects, other groups cannot function (Wingfield & Alston, 2014). Diversity has been termed as a "new library policy" that is user-friendlier (Brayboy, 2003). Predominately white spaces are environments in which Whiteness is privileged for those who are white (Wingfield & Alston, 2014).

Wingfield & Alston (2003) stated:

Researchers have long noted that organizational structures produce hierarchies and reinforce status inequalities. Within organizations, particularly workplaces and places of education, the routine patterns, practices, and expectations that are present can often serve to perpetuate certain groups' advantages over the others. (p. 28)

In agreement with the excerpt above, my participants felt any opportunity they were afforded was constructed for the success of white students. Certain expectations or initiatives, spoke to a certain group of people.

Participant 22222 stated:

If organizations require donations or fees to participate or get involved, many if not, most Black students may not be able to pay it. Manhattan is a wealthy city dominated with white people. Setting fees or payments that mirror the average income of these white people immediately disqualify Black students that come from a different community that does not have an average income of \$100k.

Brayboy (2003) states when an organization is built or functions on expired or outdated practices the negative implications will be great. Brayboy continues to say this colorblindness allows institutions to continue operating as if no problems exist with the implementation of diversity at their institutions.

Replace Laws and Practices at PWI’s Not Benefiting Black Students

Throughout the interviews another positive impact was the replacement of laws and practices that do not benefit Black students. Taking a fair and intentional look at practices leaning toward the gratification of white students can have significant implications on Black students and the education system and society (Brayboy, 2003). Here are some potential implications as stated by McKinley and Brayboy (2003):

Table 5.1 Laws and Practices

Equity and Access	Replacing discriminatory laws and practices can lead to increased equity and access to quality education for Black students. This can help bridge the education gap and provide equal opportunities for all students to succeed.
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Empowerment	By removing barriers that hinder the progress of Black students, it can empower them to reach their full potential and thrive in academic settings. This can lead to increased confidence and motivation among Black students.
Diversity and Inclusion	Replacing discriminatory laws and practices promotes diversity and inclusion in educational institutions. It creates a more inclusive and welcoming environment for Black students, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance.
Improved Academic Performance	When Black students are given equal opportunities and resources, they are more likely to excel academically. Replacing discriminatory practices can lead to improved academic performance and higher graduation rates among Black students.
Positive Impact on Society	A more equitable education system benefits not only Black students but society. It can help reduce inequality, promote social justice, and contribute to a more diverse and inclusive society.
Legal and Policy Changes	Replacing discriminatory laws and practices may require legal and policy changes at the local, state, or national level. This can lead to broader systemic reforms that address racial disparities in education and promote equality for all students.
Challenges and Resistance	Replacing discriminatory laws and practices may face challenges and resistance from individuals or groups who benefit from the status quo. Overcoming these challenges requires advocacy, activism, and a commitment to social justice.

Overall, replacing laws and practices not benefiting Black students is essential for creating a more equitable and inclusive education system that provides equal opportunities for all students to succeed. It requires a collective effort to address systemic racism and promote justice in education (Brayboy & McKinley, 2003).

Initiatives for Black Students That Remove Risk of Being Victims of Discrimination, Racism and Abuse.

During the interviews, the researcher was shocked by how even though each participant was different and had different stories, the immediate impact of having initiatives implemented could improve their academic journey and mental and social capabilities. Burke (2020) states that predominantly white universities would implement certain initiatives to help support Black students throughout their academic career and their experiences.

Table 5.2 Racial Risk Initiatives

Anti-Racism Education	Implementing anti-racism education programs in schools can help raise awareness about racism, discrimination, and bias. These programs can educate students, teachers, and staff on the impact of racism and empower them to challenge discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.
Culturally Relevant Curriculum Development	Developing a culturally relevant curriculum that reflects the experiences and perspectives of Black students can help create a more inclusive learning environment. This can help combat stereotypes, promote diversity, and validate the identities of Black students.
Diversity Training for Educators	Providing diversity training and professional development for educators can help them recognize and address racism and discrimination in the classroom. Training can help teachers create a supportive and inclusive environment for Black students and respond effectively to incidents of discrimination.
Support Services and Counseling	Offering support services and counseling specifically tailored to the needs of Black students can provide a safe space for students to express their concerns and seek help. Counseling services can address the emotional and mental health impacts of racism and discrimination.

Mentorship and Role Models	Establishing mentorship programs and connecting Black students with positive role models in the community can provide guidance, support, and encouragement. Mentorship programs can help Black students navigate challenges, build confidence, and strive for academic success.
Safe Reporting Mechanisms	Implementing safe reporting mechanisms for incidents of racism, discrimination, and abuse can empower Black students to speak up and seek help when they experience mistreatment. Schools should have clear protocols for addressing and investigating complaints of discrimination.
Community Partnerships	Collaborating with community organizations, advocacy groups, and parents can strengthen support networks for Black students and amplify efforts to combat racism and discrimination. Community partnerships can provide resources, advocacy, and opportunities for engagement.
Policy Advocacy	Engaging in policy advocacy at the local, state, and national levels can bring attention to issues of racism and discrimination in education. Advocacy efforts can push for reforms, accountability, and support for initiatives that promote equity and justice for Black students.

The implications for improving “authenticity” and “leadership” for Black students in leadership development programs for practice and future research are monumental. These implications also emphasize the need for more partnerships outside of the university which include avenues like popular community outreach hubs, such as libraries, community centers, churches, and public clubs. Though medical outreach is not typically related to educational change, inequity in healthcare and education are intrinsically linked to the subjugation of the Black community, indicating a need for more expansive networking (Graetz et al., 2022).

Theoretical Implications

It is important that the academic community continue to invest in research over “authenticity” and “leadership” among Black students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Continuing to close the gap between Black students, white faculty and students will not only invest in equality and equity for Black students but also help improve the communication barriers and expectations existing between white faculty and students within leadership. My research seeks to provide an outline and process for understanding the importance of research for Black students in leadership while also creating experiences for the development of their authenticity and leadership capabilities. PWI’s and white faculty and staff.

According to Graetz et al., (2022) the following will help close the communication gap between Black and non-students of color within research and education:

Enhancing Understanding: Such research can enhance our understanding of the unique experiences, challenges, and opportunities Black students encounter at PWIs. This can provide valuable insights into how these students navigate leadership roles and develop their authentic leadership style. Intersectionality: Future research can explore the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and other identities among Black students at PWIs. This can provide a more nuanced understanding of their leadership experiences.

Role of Institutional Culture: Research can also explore how the institutional culture of PWIs influences the leadership development of Black students. This can provide insights into how these institutions can create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Impact of Discrimination and Bias: Future research can examine the impact of discrimination, bias, and microaggressions on the leadership development of Black students at PWIs. This can help in developing strategies to address these issues.

Role of Mentorship: Research can also explore the role of mentorship in the leadership development of Black students at PWIs. This can provide insights into how mentorship programs can be designed to support these students.

Policy Implications: The findings from this research can have significant policy implications. They can inform the development of policies and practices promoting diversity, inclusion, and equity at PWIs.

Development of Leadership Programs: The research can inform the development of leadership programs tailored to the needs and experiences of Black students at PWIs. Longitudinal Studies: Future research can also involve longitudinal studies tracking the leadership development of Black students at PWIs over time. This can provide insights into the long-term impact of these institutions on their leadership development.

In conclusion, future research on authenticity and leadership among Black students at PWIs can provide valuable insights that can help in promoting their leadership development and success.

Implications for Practice

Community-engaged scholarship emphasizes faculty and students working together to improve challenges on and off campus (Post et al., 2023). Community- engaged scholarship has experienced the greatest success when community voices are uplifted, indicating to greater society what is necessary for change and comfort (Post et al., 2023). Researchers who direct programs aimed at Black student leadership and development will benefit from these findings. Specifically, my research on authenticity and leadership among Black students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) can have several implications for practitioners (Gardner& Avolio, 2010). The implications are as follows:

Culturally Responsive Leadership Training: Practitioners should develop and implement culturally responsive training programs tailored to the unique experiences of Black students at PWI's (Sawyer & Waite, 2021). Leadership educators that seek to build relationships with Black students while creating authentic and transformational leadership experiences will find training can be eye opening and instrumental in developing bridges of communication with their students.

Create and Implement Support Systems and Programs: Many predominantly white institutions lack Black leadership and leadership diversity programs. Development programs help inform and teach the tailored and unique experiences, needs, and aspirations the Black students seek to help develop their authenticity (Srivastava & Dhar, 2019). As stated above, many programs located on PWI's lack culture and diversity which in turn leads to Black students feeling uncomfortable and unwanted in this program. My findings will show how PWI's can construct such programs to promote opportunities for these authentic advancement in leadership development. These support systems should be considered on and off campus to increase relationship building.

Improvement of inclusion: Research shows when individuals feel included and important, they are more likely to show up as their authentic selves. When inclusivity is implemented and practiced, the immediate result is the creation of safe spaces for Black students. Also, improving inclusivity will result in diversity within leadership roles (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). We know if we have diversity within leadership, an improvement in addressing systemic discriminatory practices will be highlighted and hopefully removed.

Advocacy: Research can provide evidence to advocate for the needs and rights of Black students. This can involve advocating for more resources, better policies, and more

representation. Black students feel they are alone at PWI's, and their only advocates are themselves (Steele, 2010). When white staff and student advocate for Black students and the need for equal and equitable treatment, Black students will feel the sense of community which also leads to authentic behaviors like sharing their struggles and challenges with white staff and students.

Evaluation and Improvement: My research can also be used to evaluate and improve existing programs. This can involve assessing the effectiveness of these programs in promoting authenticity and leadership among Black students and making necessary improvements (Spencer et al., 2022). Because most PWI's lack programs and outlets for Black students to express their challenges and struggles, Black students feel ostracized and alone. This leads to the lack of sharing of their internal or external challenges which leads to mental and social issues. Black students feel comfortable being around other individuals who understand their struggles and challenges. It is exceedingly difficult at PWI's to find these programs or opportunities when they are not recognized as even needed in the first place. Improvement of programs and access to these outlets lead to authenticity and participation for Black students.

Building Partnerships: Research can inform the building of partnerships with other institutions, organizations, and communities. These implications can provide Black students with more opportunities for leadership development (Sponsler & Wittebort, 2020).

These relationships can be implemented on or off campus. The importance of building partnerships allows for increased visibility and opportunity for leadership representation for Black students during and post-graduation.

Policy Development: Findings can help inform the development of policies promoting authenticity and leadership among Black students. This can involve policies related to

admissions, financial aid, faculty hiring, and training (Talley & Matthews et al., 2020). We know systemic barriers create nuisances for Black students when seeking an equal and equitable opportunities. Creating policy that not only creates equity and equality for Black students, also allows for new and improved ideas.

Implications for Black Students

Feagin & Sykes (1995) state there are many implications for Black students feeling authentic in the classroom. These implications for Black students in the classroom and in leadership will help increase the representation of Black students in leadership programs.

Feagin & Sykes (1995) also state that one of the first implications of Black students feeling authentic in white spaces is increased self-confidence. When Black students can be their authentic selves, they feel more confident in expressing their thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. This can lead to a greater sense of self-worth and empowerment. The next implications is an enhanced sense of belonging. When Black students feel like they belong they are more likely to feel like they wanted, accepted and valued by their peers and faculty. Participants discussed how dealing with stress and anxiety hurt their grades. Improved academic performance could lead to engaging actively in the learning process which leads to improved academic performance because Black students feel motivated and invested in their studies. Increased cultural understanding improves sharing of diverse perspectives and experiences (Brayboy, 2023). When Black students feel comfortable in class, they feel comfortable talking to their white classmates and faculty about their culture, history, and lived experiences. This can lead to greater cultural understanding and appreciation among all students in the classroom. Opportunities for growth and learning, build opportunities for dialogue, discussion, and learning. This motivates Black

students to challenge stereotypes, misconceptions, and biases existing in the classroom. This can lead to personal growth and a deeper understanding of social issues for all individuals involved. Role modeling and inspiration serve as role models and sources of inspiration for their peers. By being true to themselves, they can inspire others to embrace their own authenticity and challenge societal norms and expectations (The Economist, 2021). Contribution to a more inclusive and equitable learning environment: where Black students can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Their presence and perspectives enrich the classroom experience for everyone, fostering a sense of diversity and promoting social justice.”

Overall, the positive implications of Black students being authentic in classrooms with predominantly white classmates and faculty extend beyond the individual student. It benefits the entire learning community by promoting diversity, cultural understanding, and a more inclusive and equitable educational experience (Tharps, 2001). As my participants understood these implications, many felt they could have benefited from these implications if the promotion of authenticity were resonated through these white spaces.

Implicit and Explicit Biases for Black Faculty in White Classrooms with Black Students

It is important to understand that biases exist amongst Black faculty and Black students at predominately white institutions. Black faculty are susceptible to a variety of challenges while in these predominately white classrooms as they try to connect with Black and white students while not appearing one-sided or favoritism (Davis et al., 2013). Black faculty report they experience aggression from Black students because they feel Black faculty favor white students which could lead to unfair expectations from both white and Black students (Haynes, 2019). Listed below are

implicit and explicit biases Black faculty experienced in predominately white classrooms from Black students (Haynes, 2019).

Table 5.3 Implicit and Explicit Biases for Black Faculty

Implicit Biases	Explicit Biases
<p>Stereotype Threat: This is an implicit bias where Black faculty may feel an intense pressure to perform at a prominent level to disprove negative stereotypes about their racial group. This can lead to stress, anxiety, and even burnout.</p>	<p>Discrimination in Hiring and Promotion: Black faculty may face explicit bias in the form of discrimination in hiring and promotion processes. Despite having the same qualifications and experience as their white counterparts, they may be overlooked for job opportunities for advancement.</p>
<p>Racial Microaggressions: These are subtle, often unconscious, slights or insults that demean individuals based on their race. Black faculty may experience microaggressions from white students or colleagues, such as being mistaken for a janitor instead of a professor, or having their expertise or qualifications questioned</p>	<p>Racial Slurs and Hate Speech: In some cases, Black faculty may be subjected to explicit racial slurs or hate speech from students or colleagues. This overt form of racism can create a hostile and unsafe working environment.</p>
<p>Bias in Student Evaluations: Research has shown that student evaluations of teaching can be influenced by implicit racial biases. Black faculty may receive lower evaluation scores compared to their white counterparts, not due to their teaching abilities, but because of students' unconscious biases.</p>	<p>Segregation and Exclusion: Black faculty may be excluded from certain academic or social events, committees, or decision-making processes. This explicit bias can lead to feelings of isolation and marginalization and can limit their opportunities for professional growth and development.</p>

Addressing these implicit and explicit biases requires a concerted effort from educational institutions to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, and to create a safe and supportive environment for Black faculty (Tosolt, 2019). This can include implementing anti-racism

training, promoting diverse hiring and promotion practices, and establishing clear policies and procedures to address racism and discrimination.

Additional Recommendations

To ensure the suggested implications are met, the following recommendations are listed. White faculty are expected to be good teachers and scholars, whereas faculty (or scholars) of color are expected to be good scholars and teachers and implement diversity (Brayboy, 2003).

Table 5.4 Additional Recommendations

Education and Awareness	Provide educational resources and workshops on white fragility and its impact in college classrooms and organizations. Encourage open discussions and dialogue on this topic to increase awareness and understanding.
Create Safe Spaces	Establish safe spaces where individuals can openly discuss issues related to white fragility without fear of judgment or backlash. Encourage respectful communication and active listening.
Address Microaggressions	Address subtle forms of racism and microaggressions that contribute to white fragility. Educate students and members of organizations on how to recognize and respond to these behaviors.
Promote Diversity	Foster a culture of diversity and inclusion within college classrooms and organizations. Encourage diverse perspectives and experiences to be valued and respected.
Train Faculty and Leaders	Provide training for faculty, staff, and leaders on how to address white fragility and create inclusive environments. Offer resources and support for staff members to navigate difficult conversations.
Support Student Organizations	Support student-led initiatives and organizations that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Encourage collaboration and partnerships to address white fragility collectively.
Hold Accountable	Hold individuals accountable for their actions and behaviors that perpetuate white fragility. Implement policies and procedures to address instances of discrimination and bias.

Seek Professional	Consider seeking guidance from diversity and inclusion experts or consultants to develop strategies and programs to address white fragility effectively.
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By implementing these recommendations, college classrooms and organizations can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for all individuals.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it seeks to provide valid and valuable research findings about white fragility and how it impacts Black Students within academics. Because it is believed that Black students are not impacted by academic courses with predominately white students or classes administered by mostly white faculty, my findings provide experiences and narratives that prove otherwise. Additionally, it is important that white faculty and PWI's recognize Black students in their class are not receiving and responding to their academic curriculum from an authentic place. Black students are always code-switching to pass the class to have a good relationship with their fellow white students and staff. Predominately white institutions, white faculty and staff, white students and Black students, graduate students will benefit from this study. Knowledge generated for this study will help provide a process and understanding on how to confront these circumstances within white spaces in a safe, impactful, and impartial manner.

This study focuses on Black students and their authenticity and leadership in the classroom and their relationship to white faculty and staff including fellow students. The positive implications from this study should help provide white staff and students the foundational understanding of what it is like to be a Black student in a predominately White classroom and how to better communicate with Black students to build bridges to improve “authenticity” and

“leadership”. This study hopes to provide understanding of how white fragility recognized and how it effects Black students including ways to help mitigate these circumstances.

It is also important to understand why authenticity for Black students is pivotal for the success of Black students in academics. When we examine authentic leadership theory (ALT) it “emphasizes the significance of leaders in enabling self-growth and advancing an ‘authentic existence’ for all members of an organization, encompassing the marginalized and underprivileged” (Wiewiora & Kowalkiewicz, 2019). Lawrence (2023) interprets ALT as a set of characteristics, values, and skills an individual possesses to make them an effective, authentic leader. This type of leader is genuine, empathic, and compassionate, striving for change often for the greater good of those around them (Lawrence, 2023). In effect, they seek to create meaningful change for the benefit of others rather than themselves. Their goals often rely on improving individual and collective lives rather than profit or material gain.

Summary

Chapter five of this study is concerned with the status of Black students in higher education while also highlighting how white fragility impacted their education journey. Through interviews, journal entries, and narrative reflections, four recommendations emerged to improve communication and relationships between Faculty and Staff.

- Participants recommend academic classes or extracurricular activities be more diverse.
- Recommend Faculty and staff communicate to help build relationships and bridges for communication.
- Recommend Faculty recognize most Black students have been a victim of racial discrimination by a staff, fellow student, fellow colleague, or faculty.

- Recommend Faculty and Staff be authentic in their daily interactions with Black students or any of persons of color.

This chapter also raises awareness about the role racism plays in the dominant society and the importance of the critical race theory on the matter of racial inequality. Present in the responses were sub-themes such as challenging systems established for white students, replacing discriminatory laws and practices with initiatives to advocate for Black students. These efforts include anti-racism teaching, culturally responsive curriculum, diversity instruction, services, and/or resource provision, mentoring, safe reporting channels, community engagement, and policy work. The significance of the findings and their practical and applied application to leadership interventions are significant. Leadership developmental programs based on cultural competence, the development of safety nets and interventions specific to the needs of Black students, and inclusive initiatives should follow (Powell, 2021). Accountability, assessment, collaboration, and governing are also especially important in fostering genuineness and Black student-leadership at PWIs.

Future research recommendations include further studying intersectionality; the influence of institutional culture; the role of discrimination and bias; investigating the efficacy of formal mentoring; discussing the implications of current policies related to Black students' leadership development; designing the most effective leadership programs; and conducting longitudinal studies focusing on Black students' leadership trajectories (Rodríguez et al., 2021).

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Appendix A-Informed Consent

PROJECT TITLE: The Effects of White Fragility on Black Students Within Higher Education

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE: 02/06/2024

PROJECT EXPIRATION DATE: 12/15/2024

LENGTH OF STUDY: 9 months

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Samuel Mwangi

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Shukeyla Harrison, Graduate Student

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Dr. Samuel Mwangi,

scmwangi@ksu.edu, 785-532-6875

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION: For the subject should they have questions or wish to discuss on any aspect of the research with an official of the university or the IRB, please contact: Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this study is to understand how white fragility impacts Black students and their self- authenticity in college and post-graduation. Each experience will be shared through individual narrative storytelling in semi-structured interviews. The following questions will guide this study are as follows: 1. What does “authenticity” and “leadership” look like for Black students at predominately white institutions. 2. How does the lack of “authenticity” and “leadership” experiences affect Black Students and their overall academic journey? 3. How does the lack of “authenticity” lack consideration for historical social-cultural factors in developing leadership? It is my hope to learn how these experiences impact each participant and their academic careers. I also hope to provide implications/solutions from these experiences to help bridge the relationship between black students and white faculty/staff.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Interviews will be conducted to determine trends and themes as black students. You will be asked to share stories regarding your experiences individually and collectively. I will use literature, statements, journals, interview recordings by Zoom or Team (audio only will be recorded) and notes collected from the interviews to examine these themes. I estimate you will participate in two separate interviews on different dates that will last 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: Due to the sensitivity of questions and the potential discomfort of reflecting or discussing experiences, it is anticipated that mild discomfort may be experienced. If this discomfort occurs, you will be free to choose not to respond to any questions at any time and also remain in the study. You will be given the chance to break at any time due to discomfort or end the interview without penalty and resume later. You are also free to choose to not participate in this study at all without penalty.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: You will benefit from knowing that someone recognizes that they may have experienced inequality and inequity while trying to pursue their education at a

predominately white institution, especially in comparison to their white counterparts. You will also benefit from being able to share your stories and perspectives and offer solutions and/or thoughts on how K-state could improve the relationships between black students and white faculty. The benefits of this study will provide information for not only KSU but other predominately white institutions in hopes of bringing light to the effects of white fragility on black students. Upon completion of the interviews, you will receive a \$20 gift card to a retail provider of their choice.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: I will take all steps to ensure your confidentiality. I will use password-protected electronic folders, file cabinets protected by key and laptops protected by passcode and encryption to store all data related to the study. I will omit any identifying information from the results and discussion and conduct debriefing sessions. I will remove any information that you do not wish to be shared. Any identifier that could be used to identify you during any part of the interview(s) or recordings or note taking will be removed immediately and deleted/or discarded in a safe and secure container to maintain confidentiality, anonymity and privacy. You will not be recognized by name, or any identifying numbers or nicknames associated with you the individual, Kansas State University, or federal government. Instead of using your name, you will be given a random 5-digit number as your identification for the entirety of the study and within my written dissertation only known to me and you. The document that will identify you as the participant by this five-digit numeric will be locked and secure in my office file cabinet accessible to only me by key. The key is kept with me one percent of the time. No one else has a copy. Any identifying information discovered within the interviews or recordings will immediately be deleted or replaced with a general descriptor. There is no social or economic risk due to anonymity and zero cost to you in this study. The researcher will only have access to any and all confidential records. All information recorded and/or documented by the researcher regarding you will only be available to you and the researcher. No family, friends or spouses will have access or be granted access to receive ANY information documented during the study. Any invasion of privacy by family or non-participant will be reported to you and university immediately. In accordance with the university, any data collected may be used or distributed for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participant.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw me consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

Do you agree to the sessions to be audio-recorded? (Please circle one) Yes or No

Do you agree to allow research activities? (Please circle one) Yes or No

Do you agree to participate in an interview? (Please circle one) Yes or No

Signed Name Date _____

Printed Name _____

Appendix B-Recruitment Email

Dear _____ (Name of Possible Participant),

I am writing to seek your interest and availability in participating in a research study with the goal of understanding your experiences or lack thereof as a Black student while attending K-State, a predominately white institution and how white fragility and its effects has affected your experience as a student. Your participation in my study will help me gain a deeper understanding of your experiences and how to provide solutions for Black students enrolled in PWI's moving forward.

The anticipated timeline for this study is from January 2024 – December 2024. As a participant, you would be asked to participate in two interviews with me that would last around one hour each. During each interview, the use of an audio recorder will be used to document and refer to any and all information discussed during each session. As a participant, you would be free to withdraw from the study at any point and/or choose to not respond to any question in an interview you find uncomfortable. If participating in this study is of interest to you, and you are available to do so, I would like to meet with you in person or by zoom within the next week to further discuss the study including research purpose and rationale and what you can expect as a participant (i.e., time and types of questions to be asked). After this meeting, if you remain interested in participating, I will provide you with an informed consent form to sign. Upon completion of the study, you will also be given a \$25 gift card to Target for your participation.

Thank you so much for your consideration. This research will be helpful to college faculty, students and administrators who want to know more about how Black students experience white fragility and how it has or has not affected their academic journey through higher education.

I look forward to hearing back from you!

Best Regards,

Shukeyla Harrison

Appendix C-Interview Questions

Interview #1 Guide (Semi-Structured)

Length: 45-60 minutes

Primary Goal: To understand how white fragility has affected your ability to be successful as a Black student within higher education and your academic career so far. To identify variables that helped and hurt your displaying your authentic versions of yourself in and out of the classroom due to white fragility displayed by white students, white staff, and faculty. Lastly, understand that if you had experienced equitable and equal circumstances like your fellow white students, how might your academic improved, stayed the same or been affected negatively. There are no right or wrong answers here. I am interested in genuinely understanding your experiences.

1. To begin, please tell me a little bit about yourself and your story up to this point in your life.
2. Tell me more about your experiences as a Black student at Kansas State University. Good, bad, or neutral.
3. Are there any specific racial experiences you had at K-State either in the classroom or within an organization/group that affects you the most? If so, tell me more about that experience and why it affected you the most.
4. When you think about the racial balance of students at K-State, what comes to mind?
5. When you think of being the authentic version of yourself, do you feel you are the same, in and out of the classroom or no difference?
6. Did you have any experiences that made you feel alone or not able to participate in class like the white students in your class?
7. Did you have any experiences with white faculty, staff or students that may you feel like you were unable to learn, participate or share verbally or socially, like the white students in your class?
8. Have you witnessed or been a participate in any situations that made you feel like you would be penalized or reprimanded for dressing, talking, walking, speaking any certain way? Displaying your authentic version of yourself?
9. When you think about your classroom experiences, do you feel you have had a fair share of leadership opportunities? Did you feel you needed to change anything about yourself like voice, language, tone, attire, hair to fit in or feel respected while in this leadership position?

10. When you think of your white classmates, do you feel included or secluded in the overall classroom experience?
11. Do you feel K-State offers enough organizations or groups that allows you to be your authentic self like cultural or social background?
12. Do you feel that since you started as a student, things regarding race, culture etc. have improved, gotten worse or the same?

Interview #2 Guide (Semi-Structured)

Length: 45-60 minutes

Primary Goal: to seek clarification and deeper understanding from the first interview, and to gain insight specifically on authenticity and leadership experiences. The following questions were asked to each participant.

1. How, if at all, do you think your racial identity shaped or impacted your experiences as a K-State student overall, in comparison to your white counterparts?
2. Do you feel like you were able to be authentic in the classroom or any organizations you were involved in? If so, how? If not, why?
3. What was the outcome if you did or did not try to be the authentic version of yourself?
4. Did you experience white fragility while trying to be authentic overall as a student at K-State? If so, what happened?
5. Do you feel you had the same opportunities as white students to be in leadership positions while attending K-State? If not, why? If so, how?
6. What is your definition of authenticity? How did you form this definition? (experiences, cultural etc.)
7. If you could change anything about your experiences as far as a Black student, what would it be?
8. If you could change anything regarding white faculty, staff or students while attending K-State to help improve your experience as a student, what would it be? If nothing, why?
9. Are The experiences you have had a K-State, similar to other experiences at other predominantly white institutions? If so, how?
10. Do you feel that your experience(s) as a Black student at K-State will help or hurt your post-graduation? If yes, how? If not, why?

How did this experience as a participant help or hurt you?

Appendix D-Survey

Qualifying Survey

This survey is intended to recruit students to participate in a study regarding their experiences as a Black student and white fragility at Kansas State University. Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Upon completion of this survey, you will be emailed and asked if you would like to continue in the process of becoming a participant for this study, assuming the qualifying criteria have been met. Thank you for your time and consideration!

- Are you currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at Kansas State University? (Academic year does not matter)
- Are you considered of the race Black, Black American, African American, African descent?
- Have you ever taken any leadership courses at Kansas State University?
- Are you involved in any organizations on campus? Ex. Student Government Association
- Do you have time to participate in a study that would require approximately 2 hours of your time over the next 6 weeks?
- Are you comfortable with sharing your experiences as a Black student while enrolled at Kansas State University? (All information shared will be confidential and anonymous)
- Your name
- Race
- Preferred Email
- Preferred Phone Number to be contacted

Appendix E-Debrief Statement

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your participation in this research study. Your involvement has been invaluable in helping me gather data and insights for my study. I would like to give you a debrief statement explaining the research's purpose, its potential findings, and any potential implications. The purpose of this study is to understand how white fragility impacts Black students and their self- authenticity in college and post-graduation. I aimed to understand how white fragility affects the experiences and academic performance of black students, and to identify strategies to address this issue. Through my study, I anticipate that white fragility can have detrimental effects on black students' self-esteem, sense of belonging, and academic achievement. The defensive reactions and resistance displayed by white individuals when confronted with issues of race and racism create a hostile and unwelcoming environment for black students. This leads to increased stress, anxiety, and disengagement from learning. My anticipated findings will highlight the urgent need to address white fragility and create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. I hope my research will bring inclusivity racial literacy, fostering dialogue, and implementing anti-racist policies and practices. If this happens, we as a black community can help promote and create a supportive and empowering environment for all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Thank you for your participation in this research study. Your involvement has been invaluable in helping me gather data and insights for my study. I would like to provide you with a debrief statement to explain the purpose of the research, its potential findings, and any potential implications. I aimed to understand how white fragility affects the experiences and academic performance of black students, and to identify strategies to address this issue. Through my study, I anticipate that white fragility can have detrimental effects on black students' self-esteem, sense of belonging, and academic achievement. The defensive reactions and resistance displayed by white individuals when confronted with issues of race and racism create a hostile and unwelcoming environment for black students. This leads to increased stress, anxiety, and disengagement from learning. My anticipated findings will highlight the urgent need to address white fragility and create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. I hope my research will bring inclusivity racial literacy, fostering dialogue, and implementing anti-racist policies and practices. If this happens, we as a black community can help promote and create a supportive and empowering environment for all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Your participation in this research study has contributed to our understanding of white fragility and its impact on black students. Your insights and experiences have helped me shed light on this important issue and identify potential solutions. I hope that our findings will inform future efforts to create a more equitable and inclusive educational system.

Once again, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your participation in my research study. Your contribution has been invaluable, and I am grateful for your time and effort.

If you have any further questions or would like more information about the research findings, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. You can contact me by email at sharrisn@ksu.edu or by cellphone at 785-473-3436.

Thank you,

Shukeyla Harrison

Appendix F-IRB Approval



TO: Samuel Mwangi Proposal Number IRB-12019
AQ Miller School of Media and Communication, Manhattan, KS 66506

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 02/07/2024

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "The Effects of White Fragility on Black Students within Higher Education."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 02/06/2024
EXPIRATION DATE: 02/05/2027

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that: **No more than minimal risk to subjects**

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems, or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and/or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 02/07/2024 12:23 PM ET

Appendix G-Participant Interview Questions and Answers

Question	Participant 11111	Participant 22222	Participant 33333	Participant 44444	Participant 55555
Tell me more about your experiences as a Black student at Kansas State University. Good, bad, or neutral.	Bad	Bad	Bad	Bad	Bad
Are there any specific racial experiences you had at K-State either in the classroom or within an organization/group that affects you the most? If so, tell me more about that experience and why it affected you the most.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
When you think about the racial balance of students at K-State, what comes to mind?	Terrible and needs change	It needs work but they seem comfortable with how it is.	Needs work and quickly if we ever want change	Seems like it is a space for white people to thrive	It works for whites better than Blacks.
When you think of being the authentic version of yourself, do you feel you are the same, in and out of the classroom or no difference?	Absolutely not. I am a great actor, for survival	No. I do what I need to do so that I can graduate soon.	Authenticity is risky especially if you want to get involved on campus.	No. Actually I feel like I am white so that I can get treated equally.	No, how can you feel authentic when all you see are white people.

Did you have any experiences that made you feel alone or not able to participate in class like the white students in your class?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Did you have any experiences with white faculty, staff or students that may you feel like you were unable to learn, participate or share verbally or socially, like the white students in your class?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Have you witnessed or been a participate in any situations that made you feel like you would be penalized or reprimanded for dressing, talking, walking, speaking any certain way? Displaying your authentic version of yourself?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

When you think about your classroom experiences, do you feel you have had a fair share of leadership opportunities? Did you feel you needed to change anything about yourself like voice, language, tone, attire, hair to fit in or feel respected while in this leadership position?	They say we have fair opportunities but who is voting? White students. If I dressed the way I dress around my black friends and family, I would get discriminated more	No, I have never had a white staff member ask me to join any club or group.	I mean, I suppose. But I am not interested in being fake. It is exhausting doing it in class everyday	I had a girl touch my hair because she thought it was hers, I guess. No, how can you win when you look nothing like the voters	No, but I have not tried to join many campus organizations.
When you think of your white classmates, do you feel included or secluded in the overall classroom experience?	No	No	No	No	No
How, if at all, do you think your racial identity shaped or impacted your experiences as a K-State student overall, in comparison to your white counterparts?	K-State is big on family. White family	It has only shown me that I need to get it done so that I can get a job.	Reminds me that I am a black student at a predominately white school.	Well, I want to graduate so I will do whatever is necessary to do that. Even if it sounds white.	Nothing.

Do you feel like you were able to be authentic in the classroom or any organizations you were involved in? If so, how? If not, why?	No	No	No	No	No
What was the outcome if you did or did not try to be the authentic version of yourself?	Haha, scare white people	Felt alone and not involved unless with other black students	They asked questions and since I do not want to answer, I just act like them	Nothing but me being uncomfortable and victim of racial slurs	I felt alone. You cannot do that in all white classes
Do you feel you had the same opportunities as white students to be in leadership positions while attending K-State? If not, why? If so, how?	No	No	No	No	No
Any takeaways or thoughts you would like to include that may be important to the researcher and the study?	Hope this research helps. I am tired of catering to white people.	Thank you for doing this. I hope your research brings light to what we go through as Black students	I wanted to leave before you showed me that someone is watching and cares	Please continue your research. It is tiring dealing with racism and being treated unfairly	I wish you could interview more students. I have so many friends that have stories to share