**Racial Climate and Belonging:**
**Experiences of Black Students at Traditionally White Liberal Arts Colleges**

BY

ERIN M. HOFFMAN
B.S., Nebraska Wesleyan University, 2003
M.A., University of Denver, 2007

DISSERTATION

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Policy Studies in Urban Education in the Graduate
College of the University of Illinois at Chicago, 2018

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

David Stovall, Advisor and Chair
Celina Sima, Educational Policy Studies
Benjamin Superfine, Educational Policy Studies
Steven Tozer, Educational Policy Studies
Annemarie Vaccaro, University of Rhode Island

For Mom and Dad

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

# LIST OF TABLES

# SUMMARY

Troubling college graduation rates in the United States, and disparities in completion rates between students of color and White students, persist even after more than 40 years of exploring the college completion phenomenon. This study follows a line of critique of Tinto's (1975; 1993) theory of student departure and posits that traditional discussions of student retention do not adequately center the experience of racism that students of color face in traditionally white institution (TWI) environments. The aim of this study, guided by critical race theory (CRT), is to understand the experience of Black students at TWI in order to challenge current perspectives of student success and retention, and work towards creating more socially just and inclusive campuses.

This multiple case study uses qualitative methods to explore the experiences of fourteen Black college students at three traditionally white liberal arts colleges in the Midwest and considers how the campus racial climate (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998) impacts Black students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), and persistence in college. Findings from this case study reveal the racial climate challenges of Black students specifically within the traditionally white liberal arts college environment, expose the nuance of these institutional contexts as well as facades of progress, and recommend key institutional investments in faculty hiring and development as well as in developing critical spaces of trust, empowerment, and healing for Black students.

# I. INTRODUCTION

In 2010, I read an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that resonated with me and articulated current challenges that were clearly evident, but from my perspective, not adequately being addressed at most colleges and universities in the United States. Baum (2010) writes:

> The metaphor of the perfect storm is badly overworked. But when you combine a student population increasingly composed of groups that have traditionally been less comfortable with, and less welcomed by, America's colleges; a higher-education system that is increasingly underfinanced for its mission; and a national political leadership that is demanding unprecedented levels of success in enrolling and graduating students—well, something has got to give.

She goes on to advocate in her article for the creation of new practices and policies that are more responsive to an increasingly diverse student body at colleges and universities across the United States. However, fast forward to 2018 and this perfect storm that she describes, including underfunding and pressure to improve outcomes, remain with very little documented progress in terms of college graduation rates. Status quo practices related to diversity and inclusion in higher education do not appear to serving the interests of students, the institutions, or broader society. Perhaps a change in course may be needed to weather the storm.

## Current Context

My interest in this research project has been growing for several years as I have sought to understand the experiences of students I work with at a four-year private liberal arts college and as I work to develop programs and opportunities that support their success. As an administrator at a traditionally White college, I am happy to see many students of color actively engaged in campus life, being recognized for prestigious academic honors, and generally enjoying the college experience. However, these same

students also share with me stories of bias, of questioning who they can trust, their regular

experiences of microaggressions, and often feeling like an imposter in the wealthy White

community that surrounds campus. These stories inevitably impact their sense of

belonging in college, their integration within academic and social fabric of the institution,

and ultimately, persistence with their education.

Students of color on my campus, and on other traditionally White college and

university campuses around the country, describe many instances that do not feel safe or

comfortable. We have seen a significant increase of students, especially Black students,

raising their concerns and demanding that administrators and faculty at their institutions

work to create a more inclusive and safe campus community where they can focus on their

academic pursuits without the distraction of racial hostility. The University of Missouri's

Concerned Student 1950 activist group, along with the football team, has received the most

attention in the media, but students at institutions across the nation from Yale University to

the University of Southern California, and even small colleges from the East to West Coast

and everywhere in between are demanding changes in policy, inclusion, increased support

for students of color. They are asking for their voices to finally be heard by the

administration. From my perspective as an administrator interested in improving the

college experience and the rates of college completion for students of color at my

institution, as well as from my role as an emerging researcher interested in understanding

the lived reality of Black students at traditionally White institutions and working for

positive change, this topic has never been so relevant and important. This research study is

seeking to understand the experience of Black students at traditionally White liberal arts

colleges in order to challenge current perspectives on student success and retention and work towards creating more socially just and inclusive campuses.

## Statement of the Problem

There is likely no topic researched more by United States higher education scholars in the last four decades than that of student retention and college completion (Tinto, 2006). There are important reasons for this including some motives that benefit colleges and universities (rankings, recruitment/admissions costs, tuition revenue), some motives that benefit U.S. economic interests (tax revenue, workforce development, global economic competitiveness), as well as some motives that benefit the college-going individual (potential for lifetime income, career preparation, intellectual development) (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Tinto, 2012). It is estimated that people who complete a bachelor's degree earn, over a lifetime, at least one million dollars more than individuals who do not go to college (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Tinto, 2012). Those individuals who complete a bachelor's degree also earn $500,000 to $650,000 more than people who either complete an associate's degree or who start college, but do not finish a baccalaureate degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Tinto, 2012).

Despite this focused attention by researchers on student success and college completion, there has been very little improvement in college completion rates. In his latest book, Completing College, Tinto (2012) cites figures that show that access to college has doubled in recent decades, from 9 million in 1980 to 20 million in 2011. However, graduation rates have increased just slightly. In fact, approximately half of students who enroll in higher education complete a degree within six years (Museus & Quaye, 2009;

Tinto, 2012) and this figure is even more concerning when considering the college completion rates of students of color and low-income/first generation students.

In a comprehensive report on graduation outcomes Engle and Tinto (2008) report that college students who are considered low-income and first generation (parents did not complete a bachelor's degree) comprise 25% of college enrollments today, and more than half of this population are students of color. The completion rates of low-income, first generation students are staggering. After six years of initially entering either a two-year or four-year institution, only 11% of low-income/first generation students completed a bachelor's degree compared with 55% of students who are not low-income and first generation (Engle & Tinto, 2008). When looking at comparisons in college completion rates by race/ethnicity, there are similar concerns. Data shows that of students who initially enroll at a four-year college or university, 63% of White students will complete the bachelor's degree within six years, while less than 43% of Black, Latino, and Native American students will do so during the same time period (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012). These statistics are also supported by a recent report from The Education Trust which reports six-year graduation rates by ethnicity in 2014 as follows: Asian/Pacific Islander (71%), White (63%); Hispanic/Latino (54%); Black (41%); and Native American (41%) (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017). Figures show that while approximately 70% of Asian/Pacific Islander students complete a bachelor's degree in six years, researchers note that it is important to disaggregate this data by ethnicity as there is vast difference in completion rates between ethnic subgroups (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

Therefore, while the topic of student retention and college completion has been studied for many decades, it is clear from the figures noted that a great deal of progress is

still needed if institutions of higher education in the United States wish to improve graduation rates, especially among students of color as well as low-income/first generation students. Furthermore, data suggests that this may be as critical as ever given current demographic trends. Engle and Tinto (2008) cite U.S. Census data, which shows that there are currently 12 million children living in poverty, that two-thirds are children of color, and 44% of school-aged children are low-income (p. 5). These demographic trends suggest that if the United States intends (and needs) to see increases in college enrollment and college completion to meet economic demands (Kuh et al., 2006), then institutions of higher education will need to reconsider how to foster success for more students, particularly students of color and low-income/first generation students.

Furthermore, while the number of students of color enrolled in college has increased in recent years, they still experience barriers academically and socially, and are less likely to feel that they "fit in" to the campus community as well as their White peers (Hurtado, 1992; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Sedlacek, 1999). Some researchers assert that the issues persist due to the lack of a common understanding of the impact of the campus racial climate, which is information that could be used to develop policies and programs to address racial issues and improve inclusivity (Hurtado et al., 1998). Researchers taking a critical look at campus racial climate at traditionally White institutions suggest that the lack of progress in improving campus racial climates is the result of supposedly well-intentioned institutions failing to address the historical legacy of racism and White supremacy (hooks, 1989; McClelland, 1990).

The consequences for institutions of higher education who fail to adequately address issues of retention as well as the gap in engagement and belonging between White

students and students of color that exists on most traditionally White campuses is significant. Disregarding the climate challenges for students of color perpetuates racism and creates an environment where it is difficult for students of color to engage and thrive. Furthermore, institutions need to consider how to effectively provide supportive and engaging academic environments and opportunities for all students, while addressing negative experiences related to racism for students both within and outside of the classroom. This focus is critical for improved retention and graduation rates as enrollments of first generation students and students of color continue to rise. Without this focus, the college completion differences between White students and students of color will likely extend rather than narrow.

Lastly, while there is evidence that all underrepresented racial groups experience dissatisfaction with the campus racial climate at traditionally White institutions, there is greater dissatisfaction reported by Black students than by other students of color (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008). This finding suggests that Black students may be carrying a heavier burden due to racism at traditionally White institutions. This includes their unique experiences with unwelcome or hostile environments, along with their perception of the campus environment that may differ from the experiences of other ethnic subgroups. This, coupled with the current racial tensions that have been seen nationwide on college and university campuses, provide the justification for research that specifically explores the voices and stories of Black students at traditionally White institutions.

**Significance of the Study**

      The disparities in college completion rates between students of color and White students in the United States is concerning and is worthy of on-going research and discussion. Furthermore, as the literature review to follow discusses, the student retention research which was built upon Tinto's (1975; 1993) theory of student departure, does not adequately center the experience of racism that Black students face in traditionally White institutional environments that were established on, and maintain, White norms and values. It is important to examine the experiences of students of color from the perspective of critical race theory and expose the lived realities of students of color at these colleges and universities. Most traditionally White institutions have a commitment to diversity and multiculturalism and many have made efforts to diversify the student, faculty, and staff bodies while also providing curriculum, student organization, and programming opportunities that offer diverse cultural perspectives. However, these efforts do not necessarily address the historic, and current, racism that traditionally White institutions were founded on and perpetuate. Additionally, efforts towards multiculturalism do not address the perceptions and attitudes of students, faculty, and staff, or their behavior and intergroup dynamics.

      The research and theoretical perspectives that provide the foundation for this research study show that a sense of belonging is necessary for motivation and educational success, and that this may be particularly important for students of color in traditionally White environments. Therefore, it is important to further this research to understand how the campus racial climate in traditionally White environments can foster or inhibit a sense

of belonging for Black students, and how the TWI environment impacts their motivation for learning and engagement in college.

Finally, in their 2007 meta-analysis of research on campus racial climate at predominantly White institutions, Harper and Hurtado note that the existing literature is primarily quantitative and was most often conducted at large universities. This is interesting because previous research by Hurtado (1992) suggests that institutional type and size had an impact on level of perceived concern related to campus racial climate. Perceptions were more positive among four-year private institutions due to their student-centered nature. One might assume that small private colleges (which are very student-centered) have even more positive climates. The body of existing literature on campus racial climate includes data from primarily mid-size and large research institutions. The campus racial climate phenomenon has not been adequately studied and understood in small institutional environments. Also, there is little existing literature that is both qualitative and conducted at multiple sites (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Therefore, this study has the potential to contribute to existing literature by using qualitative methodology at multiple, small liberal arts colleges.

## Research Questions

This research, aligned with critical race theory (CRT), takes the position that racism is endemic to institutions of higher education, their environments, and climates. With CRT as a lens and guiding framework, the purpose of this study is to provide the opportunity for Black students attending traditionally White liberal arts colleges to reflect on their racialized experiences in college. Secondly, this study seeks to understand how campus racial climate impacts Black students' sense of belonging at the institution. Finally, a third

purpose is to gain an understanding of what has contributed to success and persistence for Black students. The guiding research questions for this study are:

1. How do Black students experience the campus racial climate at traditionally White liberal arts colleges?

2. In what way do experiences with the campus racial climate impact a sense of belonging for Black students at traditionally White liberal arts colleges?

3. Where do Black students find a sense of belonging at traditionally White liberal arts colleges?

## Theoretical Framework

There are multiple frameworks that have been used in education when studying race and racism, but of late, Leonardo (2012) states that critical race theory (CRT) has become the dominant framework for studying race in education (p. 11). CRT offers an important lens for exploring the experiences of students of color in traditionally White environments given the long history of marginalizing their identities both in higher education research and in practice at colleges and universities. In 1995, Ladson-Billings and Tate put out a call to fellow education researchers calling for a critical race theory of education. They said, "[a] growing number of education scholars of color are raising critical questions about the way research is being conducted in communities of color" (p. 58). This is similar to the concern raised in the student departure literature about the voices and experiences of students of color being left out, left to the margins, or represented only from a deficit perspective. They go on to say, "without authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities" (Ladson-

Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). This perspective holds true today and might say something about the lack of real, consistent progress that has been made in improving the educational experiences, and the college persistence rates, of students of color and low-income college students.

The roots of critical race theory come from legal studies. The area of study was spurred forward by the stalling of civil rights movement in the 1970s after much progress seemed to be made in the 1960s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Similarly, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued for a new paradigm for pressing into the issues of race and racism in education after what they perceived to be a stalling of the multicultural education movement. They discuss that multiculturalism in education is limited as it has been reduced to representing ethnic food, music, and tradition in school contexts, rather than examining and addressing on-going racism, and its root causes, within education.

Critical race scholars in the fields of higher education and student affairs have more recently advocated for increasing the use of CRT in an effort to address race, racism, and racial realities in ways that were previously overlooked or subtly addressed (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Solórzano and Yosso (2001) discuss CRT in education as a framework or a set of perspectives, methods, and pedagogy, which works to transform education structures that perpetuate dominate racial norms (p. 480). Though there is not one definition of CRT in education, many education scholars agree on the following tenets (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004), which provide theoretical lens for this study:

1. Recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.

CRT recognizes that racism is embedded deeply into American life and that it can be difficult to recognize (Yosso et al., 2004; Harper et al., 2009). As a result, it is part of the foundation and historical legacy of institutions and systems of education, similar to the discussion of historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion discussed in Hurtado et al.'s (1998) framework of campus racial climate.

Additionally, CRT recognizes that though race and racism need to be centered in this analysis, given the historical legacy of systemic racism and the ongoing disparities between people of different racial groups, there is a mindfulness of the intersections of various forms of oppression including racism, sexism, and classism (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Yosso et al., 2004).

2.  Challenges dominant societal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy.

Claims within education that all people have equal access to education and are treated the same within systems are challenged in CRT. Furthermore, an important component of CRT is rooted in the concept of "whiteness as property" (Harris, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and property rights are transferrable. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) discuss that whiteness is transferrable, or alienable, when connected to certain aspects of student performance. Further, "[w]hen students are rewarded only for conformity to perceived 'white norms' or sanctioned for cultural practices (e.g. dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge), white property is being rendered alienable" (p. 59). This concept is evident in the discussion of college student persistence to follow in the review of literature when the expectation of

students of color is to assimilate and conform to the norms and values of traditionally White institutions of higher education.

3.  Recognizes of the experiential knowledge of people of color.

    CRT invites the individual story, counter-story, and naming one's own reality.

    > CRT in education recognizes that the experiential knowledge of Students of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. In fact, critical race educational studies view this knowledge as a strength and draw explicitly on the Student of Color' s lived experience by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, chronicles, and narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 473).

4.  Shows a commitment to social justice and eliminating oppression.

    CRT in education is oriented to activism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and the research agenda focused on social justice seeks to expose injustices as well as the "'interest- convergence' of civil rights gains" (Yosso et al., 2004, p. 4). The concept of interest-convergence recognizes that a culture of whiteness will only tolerate gains by Black people when those gains also benefit White people (Harper et al., 2009).

    There is an important component of interest-convergence in the discussion of student persistence and college completion that must be acknowledged. Though the interest in improving college completion certainly benefits students of color through greater access to career opportunities; it also, as discussed earlier, benefits colleges and universities through improved institutional rankings as well as U.S. global economic competitiveness by developing a more educated workforce.

5.  Functions from a transdisciplinary perspective.

    CRT in education also seeks to consider racism in education from both a historical and contemporary context and incorporates the research and knowledge from a variety

of fields including sociology, psychology, ethnic studies, law, and women's studies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). An understanding of both the historical context of racism in U.S. institutions of higher education as well as the contemporary context of student unrest and advocacy for a more inclusive campus, which has dominated conversations on many college and universities campuses in in the last several years, is critical for situating this study and aligns with the claim of social constructivism that meaning, or truth, is constantly evolving as people experience and respond to what is going on in the world around them.

CRT is valuable as a framework for studying the experiences of Black students at traditionally White institutions because it offers an opportunity to examine and name the racist structures that advance dominant ideologies that ultimately keep colleges and universities from improving the campus racial climate and the experience of students regardless of if the perpetuation of racism is intentional or unconscious. Furthermore, it promotes the centering of the stories, counterstories, and lived experiences of students, and seeks to not only understand the oppression and injustice, but also address it. CRT, then, provides the framework needed to examine a particular experience of Black college students in a new way.

## Analytical Frameworks

Critical race theory as a theoretical framework situates this study with the current and historical context in mind, while focusing on the racialized experiences of Black students in college, and centering their stories in the research. Two additional frameworks provide a supplementary lens for analyzing the data. Hurtado et al.'s (1998) framework for understanding campus racial and Strayhorn's (2012) model of college students' sense of

13

belonging provide the analytical frameworks used in this study. Hurtado et al. (1998) state, "[t]he institutional context contains four dimensions resulting from educational programs and practices. They include an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of various racial/ethnic groups, its structural diversity in terms of numerical representation of various racial/ethnic groups, the psychological climate of perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and the behavioral climate dimension, characterized by intergroup relations on campus. We conceive the institutional climate as a product of these various elements" (p. 282). This study focuses primarily on the psychological dimension and the behavioral dimension of campus racial climate as described above. The research will focus on the perceptions and attitudes of students and how they feel about their experience, and the campus racial climate, at their institution. It will also explore the nature of the intergroup relations between students on the campus.

Strayhorn's (2012) framework is based on a summation of an extensive body of literature and provides a model for understanding college students' sense of belonging and its impact on student success. In defining a sense of belonging, he states, "sense of belonging is a basic human need and a fundamental motivation, that it drives student behaviors, and facilitates educational success. Sense of belonging develops in response to the degree to which an individual feels respected, valued, accepted, and needed" (p. 87). This notion is supported by numerous studies guided by Maslow's (1954) theory of human motivation and continuing on with empirical support for the positive impact of belonging has on educational outcomes. In full, there are seven theoretical elements to the model:

1. Sense of belonging is a basic human need.

2. Sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior.

3. Sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain context, certain times, among certain groups of people.

4. Sense of belonging is related to and a consequence of mattering;

5. Intersecting identities affect sense of belonging.

6. Sense of belonging leads to positive outcomes.

7. Sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis as conditions and contexts change (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 18-23).

Attending to how students feel they belong within the campus community has a significant impact on the success of students. Strayhorn's framework demonstrates that this is particularly important for students of color in traditionally White college environments and it impacts positive outcomes such as retention and graduation rates (Strayhorn, 2012).

This combination of theoretical and analytical frameworks allow for exploring and analyzing how Black students at traditionally White liberal arts colleges experience and make sense of the campus racial climate, how this impacts their sense of belonging in the collegiate environment, and their persistence to the completion of a degree.

**Researcher Positionality, Whiteness, and Critical Race Theory**

I choose to engage this research topic because my role as an educator in a predominantly White liberal arts context has provided the opportunity to see the difficulty that students of color are experiencing at times, which I believe could be improved if faculty and administrators would be willing to consider how the perpetuation of racism, and ultimately the permeation Whiteness including White norms and values, work to hinder the success of underrepresented and historically marginalized student

communities. I am a White, middle class woman who grew up experiencing significant privilege and a relatively straightforward path through my education and to a good career. I have also been very lucky to have been in academic, professional, and social communities which have granted me the opportunity to learn and grow in my understanding of how racism operates and is perpetuated. I have had many individuals in these communities engage me, challenge me, and encourage me towards my own continued growth, but also towards action in an effort to challenge racist systems and seek social justice.

I had some trepidation as I considered my pursuit this topic because I wondered if I would be able to thoughtfully, and appropriately, represent the voices of Black college students as a White researcher. I felt for some time that this was an important perspective to further expose, especially given the lack of research that I was finding from a liberal arts college context. Wrestling, then, with my uncertainty was important in order to move forward with this study.

Bergerson (2003) discusses the processing that she needed to do to determine for herself if there was a place for her as a White researcher seeking to use CRT to tackle issues of racism in education. She explored the critiques of White researchers in this role, including the legitimate concern that, "for whites to move into the area of CRT would be a form of colonization" (p. 52) and that in representing the counterstory, a central element of CRT, whites cannot validly represent the stories of people of color (p. 56). Futhermore, the White researcher must acknowledge what they stand to gain professionally with their research and whether their research efforts are inherently motivated by social justice, or by a desire for their personal prominence. In her article, Bergerson (2003) wrestles with the tensions, but ultimately determines that incorporating CRT is important for the work of

16

social justice. Because centering race and racism in educational research is so important, CRT remains an essential framework, which invites the researcher to see the role of racism in educational inequities and name it as such. Milner (2007) argues that a researcher does not need to come from the racial group that they are studying, but that they must be very tuned into the tensions that can occur when conducting research related to race and culture.  Sleeter (1996), a White researcher, advocates for a break with Whiteness, which would mean "learning to share, listen, and learn from people who are not of European decent" and "supporting policies and actions that would redistribute social resources more equally" (p. 264). This philosophy is aligned with the tenets of CRT, which seek to expose systems of White supremacy, challenge notions of meritocracy, and seek more socially just institutions. I identify with Sleeter (1993) again when she discusses how White scholars can engage in research and discussions of race and racism, "[l]earning to share the spotlight or step aside altogether is one of the things Whites need to work on. But Whites are not spectators of racism; we are participants, and I cannot help to deconstruct White racism if I do not participate" (p. 13). It is my hope that this research will help to expose White racism by sharing the voices of the student participants to advocate to campus leaders, and to readers, in an effort to take steps towards creating more truly inclusive, supportive, and responsive campus environments for Black students. Part of doing this work will involve efforts to consider how my identity as a White researcher interplays with my understanding of perspectives of the student participants, which is part of the reflexivity process (Gordon, 2005). I also include other measures to ensure trustworthy findings, which is discussed in the next chapter.

## Definition

### Traditionally White Institution

To some degree, I use the terms predominantly White institution and traditionally White institution interchangeably, and the majority of the existing research refers to predominantly White institutions in their discussions. However, I am using traditionally White institution in this discussion because it provides some recognition for the historical legacy of White culture and norms of the colleges that are the focus of this research. These institutions were established, in most cases, by White people for White people, and though they have evolved to serve a more diverse student population, the historical roots remain. Also, there are some traditionally White institutions, such as the University of Texas-Austin, that have undergraduate populations in which White students are no longer the majority. Therefore, the term predominantly White institution may no longer apply to University of Texas-Austin, but traditionally White institution does based on this definition.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### History of Higher Education Access for Black Students in the U.S.

Historically, access to and opportunities for Black students in United States colleges and universities was restricted, limited, and under-resourced, but beginning in the 1820s, a very small number of Black students began accessing higher education in the United States (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Thelin, 2003). In 1833, Oberlin College, a liberal arts institution in Ohio, was the first college in the United States to develop a policy to openly admit Black students (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Harper et al., 2009). By the mid 1800s, the first colleges specifically created to educate Black students opened in the southern United States (Harper et al., 2009; Thelin, 2003). These colleges were the first of what are now considered historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU).

Access to higher education for all people in the United States increased with the implementation of new legislation, the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862. This Act provided funds and land for the development of public universities in every state (Harper et al., 2009; Thelin, 2003), though some states did not open public land-grant universities for African Americans until the passage of the second Morrill Act of 1890, which specifically "mandated that funds for education be distributed annually on a 'just and equitable' basis" (Harper et al., 2009, p. 395). Despite the establishment of many new public universities for Black students in the mid to late 1800s, these institutions remained under-resourced in comparison to White public institutions (Harper et al., 2009). The Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1896 ruled that public institutions could remain segregated only if the education and facilities provided to Black students was equal to that of White students. However, even after the Plessy v. Ferguson ruling, parity was never actually established (Harper et al.,

2009) and by the 1940s, only two percent of African Americans in the United States had a college degree (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

The Supreme Court ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, which ended legalized "separate, but equal" public education, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made it illegal for any institution that receives federal funding to discriminate on the basis of race, and affirmative action requirements were instrumental in furthering higher education access for African Americans in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Harper et al, 2009). However, with Black students' increased access to and attendance at traditionally White institutions (TWI), HBCU enrollment declined significantly over a couple of decades from approximately 90% before the Brown decision to less than 20% by the mid 1970s (Allen, 1992). By 2004, 88% of Black students attending college in the U.S. were enrolled in TWI (Harper et al., 2009). The progress in increased Black student enrollment, especially among highly selective traditionally White institutions, did not go unchallenged, however. The opposition to increased enrollments of Black students in TWI required advocacy for the importance of race-conscious admissions practices at colleges and universities across the United States.

**The Rationale for Diversity in Higher Education**

While the overview presented above shows how the long history of racism in the United States limited the educational attainment opportunities for African Americans in the United States, much of the more recent discussions, and research, on increasing diversity at traditionally White institutions has centered less on the importance of remediating the racist past and more on the value added of a diverse student population for all students, and for the institution (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). This change in the

rationale for affirmative action from what Yosso et al. (2004) calls the "remedial rationale" to the "diversity rationale", is due to recent challenges to the ruling in the 1978 court case Bakke v. Regents of the University of California. In that case, the majority of the Supreme Court supported the remedial rationale, stating that in an effort to overcome racially discriminatory policies of the past, race conscious admissions practices are necessary (Yosso et al., 2004, p.9).

However, in two challenges to the race-conscious admissions policies at the University of Michigan, Gratz, et al. v. Bollinger and Grutter, et al. v. Bollinger, the diversity rationale was used as support. As an expert witness, educational researcher Patricia Gurin stated, "[a] racially and ethnically diverse university student body has far-ranging and significant benefits for all students, non-minorities and minorities alike. Students learn better in a diverse educational environment, and they are better prepared to become active participants in our pluralistic, democratic society once they leave such a setting" (1999). The diversity rationale was upheld in the Grutter case and the admissions practice was found to be unlawful in the Gratz case (Harper et al., 2009).

The Grutter case shows movement away from admissions practices that recognize the historical legacy of racism that has impacted, and continues to influence, the educational opportunities of African Americans in the United States. Though advocates for the diversity rationale contend that,

> In a post-civil rights era and beyond, higher education leaders set the vision to create in their institutions a microcosm of the equitable and democratic society we aspire to become. The admission of a more racially/ethnically diverse student body is an import starting point in realizing this vision. Classroom diversity, diversity programming, opportunities for interaction, and learning across diverse groups of students in the college environment now constitute important initiatives to enhance the education of all students (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002, p. 362).

However, in a counter-argument to the diversity rationale, and aligned with the tenets of critical race theory, Yosso et al. (2004) acknowledges that this perspective centers the majority experience and the benefits to White students, rather than considering the needs or experiences of students of color. This is a clear example of interest-convergence, which is the type of action that CRT in education seeks to expose. In this case, diversifying the student body was a suitable argument because it benefits White students as well.

**Enrollment of Black Students in Higher Education**

Despite the on-going challenges in the courts to affirmative action policies, college enrollment by Black students, regardless of institutional type, has increased in recent decades, in large part due to some of the important policy efforts of the 1960s. By 1995, Bowen and Bok (1998) report that more than 15% of African Americans held college degrees and there were significant increases in the earnings of Black families and the opportunities for professional and managerial positions. However, progress at many of the top colleges and universities in the United States has stalled somewhat in recent decades due to numerous and on-going challenges to the affirmative action policies that contributed to the increased access to higher education for African Americans (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Harper et al., 2009; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004).

Between 1990 and 2014, the percentage of Black people aged 25-29 in the U.S. who hold a high school diploma or equivalent increased from 82% to 92%, while the percentage of Whites aged 25-29 with a high school diploma increased from 90% to 96% in that same period (NCES, 2015). These figures show that the gap between White and Black high school attainment has shrunk to four percent. Additionally, rates of Black students attending college immediately after graduating from high school have increased from 50% in 1990 to

22

57% in 2013, as compared with White student enrollment increases from 62% to 67% in that same time period (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 187). These statistics suggest that Black student college participation may be increasing at a faster rate than their White counterparts.

However, despite the increases in the high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates of Black students in the United States, the college completion rates generally, and the gap between the college completion rates of White students and Black students, remain a concern. According to U.S. Department of Education statistics (2014), 65% of White students who originally enrolled at a 4-year institution in 2006 completed a bachelor's degree in six years compared with 44% of Black students. Additionally, while there has been a modest four-point increase in White student bachelor's degree attainment in the past decade, there has been no improvement in Black student college completion rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), so the gap between White and Black college completion appears to be widening.

**The Economic Impact of College Completion**

A joint 2012 report by the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the U.S. Department of Education makes the point that, "[h]igher education is a critical mechanism for socioeconomic advancement among aspiring individuals and an important driver of economic mobility in our society. Moreover, a well- educated workforce is vital to our nation's future economic growth" (p. 2). The report documents the important contributions that a college education has on an individual's earning potential as well as the impact to economic mobility for low-income people in the United States. The report cites statistics from 2011 that show that an individual with a bachelor's degree earns 64%

more than a high school graduate and that this difference in earning is higher at the point of the report than it has been at any other time since 1915 when measurement of the college wage gap began (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012). The report also documents how higher education impacts economic mobility for individuals and their families.

> Without a college degree, children born in the bottom income quintile have a 45 percent chance of remaining there as adults. With a degree, they have less than a 20 percent chance of staying in the bottom quintile of the income distribution and a roughly equal chance of ending up in any of the higher income quintiles (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012, p. 2).

In addition to the positive economic impact to the individual who earns a college degree, a well-educated population, and workforce, positively contribute to U.S. economic interests as well. Then Treasury Secretary of the United States, Timothy Geithner, said it this way,

> The moral case for doing a better job of giving Americans the opportunity to succeed is very compelling. The economic case is just as strong. If more Americans are educated, more will be employed, their collective earnings will be greater, and the overall productivity of the American workforce will be higher. (as cited in U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012, p. 13)

The report documents that college graduates are more likely to be in better health, have lower death rates, and less likely to be unemployed (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012). Furthermore, the United States relies on a well-educated workforce to meet the demands for high skill positions in order to stay competitive in the global market. However, the United States does not seem to be keeping this competitive edge due to some of the challenges in producing college graduates. Statistics show that the U.S. is near the top of

other economically strong countries with college graduates between the ages of 55-64, however "among younger adults (25-34 year olds), the United States is ranked 16th in postsecondary education" (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012, p. 37). It appears that the United States is losing ground in this area. And, of course, it is critical to note, as described previously, that significant gaps in educational attainment by ethnic group persists (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012).

The strong economic argument for college completion as well as the troubling college completion statistics have been a cause for concern among higher education policy makers and practitioners for many years and has, therefore, resulted in the development of a significant body of research into the problem.

## The Problem of College Student Retention

Discussions of college student success and retention generally begin with a review of Tinto's interactionalist theory of student departure (1975; 1993), which has been described as having achieved "near-paradigmatic" status in the higher education literature (Braxton & Lieu, 2000). In his oft-cited work on the higher education dropout, Tinto (1975) "formulate[s] a theoretical model that explains the processes of interaction between the individual and the institution that lead differing individuals to dropout from institutions of higher education" (p. 90). The framework, which comes from a sociological perspective, likens the dropout decision making to Durkheim's theory of suicide (see Durkheim, 1961; Tinto, 1975; 1993). Tinto explains that just as individuals who are not adequately integrated into society are more likely to commit suicide, college students who are not adequately integrated into the college or university environment, are also more

25

likely to leave their particular institution, or college altogether (Tinto, 1975; 1993). There

are multiple parts to the integration that cause a student to be sufficiently connected to the

college or university community. One component is related to the sufficiency of

interactions with others at the institution. Secondly, Tinto notes the importance of

congruency between the individual and the institution (Tinto, 1975; 1993). Tinto argues

that if the quality of interaction with others is lacking and/or there is a lack of congruency

of values, then the student is more likely to dropout (Tinto, 1975; 1993). Central to Tinto's

(1975; 1993) theory is that both academic and social integration are important

components and have an impact on a student's dropout decision-making.

Tinto's theory of student departure (1993) also incorporates Van Gennep's

anthropological model of cultural rites of passage (see Van Gennep, 1960; Kuh et al., 2006;

Museus & Quaye, 2009), which involves a process of separating from the individual's prior

group (i.e. family, community), transition to the new culture or environment (i.e. college),

and incorporating the norms and values of the new group (i.e. institutional). Tinto's (1993)

theory argues "students who leave college are those who are unable to effectively distance

themselves from their family or community of origin and adopt the values and the

behavioral patterns that typify the environment of the institution they are attending" (Kuh

et al., 2006, p. 11).

Lastly, Tinto's theory places greater emphasis on the characteristics of the student

that impact dropout behavior and less emphasis on the institutional influences. He notes

numerous individual factors that are considered to be predictors of college persistence.

These include, "characteristics of his family, characteristics of the individual himself, his

educational experiences prior to college entry, and his expectations concerning future

educational attainments" (Tinto, 1975, p. 99). Tinto notes that individuals from low

socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to dropout from college (1975). It is alarming

that the concern about socioeconomic variables has been a known retention concern for 40

years, yet according to a 2008 report, six years after starting college, 43% of low-

income/first generation students left without a degree and only 11% had completed their

degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). It appears that virtually nothing has been accomplished for

low-income students even after 40 years of research.

Despite a lack of tangible progress at institutions of higher education generally, the

last several decades of research on college student retention and completion has involved

testing, building upon, and critiquing Tinto's (1975; 1993) theory of student departure.

Numerous scholars have critiqued Tinto and argued for a cultural perspective on student

departure (Braxton, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye,

2009; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1999; 2000) stating that the theory was

developed based on research on middle-class, White male students and lacks an

understanding of and regard for the diverse cultures and experiences of the college-going

population of today. The section that follows further explores these critiques and efforts

that have been made to centralize the experience of students of color in the discussion of

college student success.

### Debate of Tinto's Theory and Students of Color

Despite being the preeminent theory of college student departure over the past

several decades, Tinto's theory (1975; 1993) has endured significant criticism.

Additionally, some of the more recent debates regarding supporting student success for

students of color at traditionally White institutions center on the same issues that are key

to the critique of Tinto's theory. These debates are often based on the view that the theory, and expectations of students of color at TWI, is culturally biased (Tierney, 1999; Kuh & Love, 2000; Kuh et al., 2006; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Tinto's (1975; 1993) theory does not take into consideration the difficulties that some students of color experience as they transition into the TWI environment, including how the environment often does not support or affirm their identity, making it challenging to fully engage and participate with the resources and opportunities that are available (Kuh et al., 2006). In particular, researchers critique the theory's assumptions of assimilation to the TWI academic culture (Guiffrida, 2006; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1999). Furthermore, researchers note that the theory puts that onus on individual student characteristics and action, as opposed to institutional characteristics and action, as the key component of student success or failure (Rendon et al., 2000). With the prediction for success or failure based on student characteristics, the institution has very little reason to examine practices for cultural inclusion. Lastly, there is a lack of recognition that how students of color experience integration, as described by the theory, may be vastly different than that of White students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

**Individual Characteristics versus Institutional Characteristics**

One of the critiques of Tinto's theory of student departure is, as described by Rendon et al. (2000) as "an overemphasis on individual responsibility for change and adaptation" (p. 143). In Tinto's (1975) paper, he puts forth the predictive model of student departure that has a strong emphasis on using individual and family characteristics as a predictor of success or failure. The family's socioeconomic background and family support of education are predictive of success or dropout. Furthermore, he notes that higher

income families tend to expect a college education, and are therefore more supportive of the educational process (Tinto, 1975). This focus on individual (or family) characteristics, rather than institutional characteristics that lead to failure (or success) sets up what Rendon et al. (2000) talk about as person-centered problems. They say, "[i]n the case of studying why minority cultures experience alienation, a person-centered definition would identify the pathology as residing with minority group characteristics" (p. 128). They go on to discuss that once the person-centered problem is established, regardless of the validity, the perspective tends to become rooted as truth and works to solidify inequities (Rendon et al., 2000).

Certainly, later versions of Tinto's work communicate institutional responsibility for student persistence. In fact, in his latest book, Tinto (2012), states that institutions have an obligation to help a student persist to graduation, "and establishing conditions within its walls that promote those outcomes" (p. 6). Unfortunately, however, much of the higher education perspective, and several decades of research, still functions with the expectation that the individual student will, and should, conform to the institution.

**Assumption of Assimilation**

Numerous scholars critique the underlying assumption in Tinto's theory that students of color "must separate from their cultural realities and take the responsibility to become incorporated into the college's academic and social fabric in order to succeed" (Rendon et al., 2000, p. 129). On a practical level, this assumption takes the responsibility off of the institution to adjust practice to respond to the needs of a diverse student community, but rather it allows the expectation for the student to conform to institutional norms and values. According to Tinto's theory, students may need to break away from their

home communities if they wish to succeed in their new academic environment, especially if the home community values are not consistent with that of the college or university (1975; 1993). Students, then, are forced to reconcile a commitment to their family and communities with their goal to achieve a college degree (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1999). Tinto's perspective not only places the responsibility on the student to adjust to the cultural norms of the institution, rather than the institution to be culturally responsive to the needs of all students, but it also lacks recognition of the strengths and assets that students of color and first generation college students bring with them to the college experience.

There is a growing body of research that debates this assimilation expectation of Tinto's theory and supports maintaining connections with the home community as a key to success for students of color in college. Tierney's (1999) research considers the assumption made by Tinto's theory as a form of cultural suicide for students of color and instead, he advocates for programs and initiatives that support and affirm the cultural identities of underrepresented students. Yosso (2005) explores the idea of cultural wealth from a critical race theory (CRT) perspective. She advocates for changing the research lens from a deficit perspective that assumes communities of color lack the cultural capital for educational success, and instead refocusing on "various indicators of capital that have rarely been acknowledged as cultural and social capital in communities of color" (p. 82). A study of youth of color by Carter (2006) provides support for this idea. Her research found that the youth of color who were most successful and satisfied with their educational experience were those that she calls "cultural straddlers." These young people "value and embrace skills to participate in multiple cultural environments, including mainstream

society, their school environments, and their respective ethnoracial communities" (Carter, 2006, p. 306). This research suggests that expecting students of color to break away from their cultural norms and home communities may do much more harm, than good, in regards to academic achievement.

Other scholars have explored the tension that exists for students of color from collectivist-oriented cultures as they work to transition to institutions of higher education, which tend to function from, and cater to, individualism (Guiffrida, 2006; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Guiffrida (2006) notes that collectivist cultures value harmony, interdependence, and emotional attachment and are found among many Asian, African, and Latin American cultures. The United States, United Kingdom, and other European cultures tend to value individualism and competition. This research suggests that the disparities in student success between White students and students of color may be impacted by institutional norms and values that preference individualism and marginalize collectivist-orientations (Guiffrida, 2006; Guiffrida, Kiyama, Waterman, & Museus, 2012).

Another line of research has found that ethnic student organizations and cultural centers contribute in positive ways to supporting the gaps that exist between home communities and institutional environments at TWI (Guiffrida et al., 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Patton, 2006). This research supports the notion within Tinto's (1975; 1993) theory that social integration within the campus environment is important. However, studies also show that ethnic-orientated organizations and centers provide important outlets for students of color as they work to navigate multiple cultures. Harper and Quaye's (2007) qualitative study with Black male student leaders reveal that the Black student organizations were the primary space of involvement for their

31

participants. The men in the study found success working with diverse peers, staff, and faculty on committees, but the Black student organizations provided the needed space to affirm and support their Black identity and help them to thrive academically and socially within the institutional environment (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Ethnic organizations and cultural centers at TWI can be seen as a "home away from home" (Patton, 2006, p. 644) and a greatly needed space of support and affirmation in what may otherwise be an unwelcoming environment for students of color.

**Integration versus Belonging**

Given that many TWI environments maintain norms and values based on mainstream, or White dominated, cultural values and individualism, Hurtado and Carter (1997) argue that academic and social integration, as described by Tinto (1975; 1993), may be completely different for marginalized communities within academe. Hurtado and Carter (1997) took issue with the assumption that the academic and social integration of Tinto's theory was assumed to be the same for majority and minority students alike. Their research sought to ask critical questions about how Latino students encountered and engaged with educational environments where their cultural identity felt marginal to campus life and if a sense of marginality inhibited their success (Hurtado & Carter, 2007, p. 324). They also sought to understand if it was possible for students of color to be integrated into the social and academic life, which are key indicators for success according to Tinto's model, yet feel a lack of affirmation and belonging at the same time (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Their quantitative study of Latino students revealed that academic integration as described in part by interactions with faculty and peers in Tinto's theory did not lead to a sense of belonging for these students, though a strong GPA did correlate with a

sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Furthermore, engagement with cultural and

mainstream student organizations was positively correlated to a sense of belonging, while

perceptions of a hostile campus racial climate was negatively associated with a sense of

belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Lastly, they found that Latino students who felt at

"home" in the campus community were those who were connected on-campus while also

maintaining connections to their home community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). This study

provides additional evidence to support the critiques of Tinto's theory of student departure

and indicates the importance of other theoretical frameworks for understanding the

experiences of students of color in college. The sections to follow review the literature

college students' sense of belonging and campus racial climate in an effort to better

understand the impact of these theoretical constructs on college success for students of

color at TWI.

## Sense of Belonging

Given the research that suggests that integration into the academic and social

aspects of college are important for persistence (Kuh et al., 2006; Tinto, 1975; 1993) and

Hurtado and Carter's (1997) finding that a sense of belonging may be a more helpful way to

explore the experiences of students of color, this section reviews the literature and theory

behind sense of belonging, which originates in psychology.

### Sense of Belonging and Motivation

It has been well established through research that the need to have positive social

relations, create connections, to strive to fit in to one's community, or belong is significant

to human beings (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Goodenow, 1993; Maslow, 1954;

Osterman, 2000). Maslow (1954) includes belongingness as part of his theory of human

motivation (hierarchy of needs). In his theory, belongingness is considered a psychological

need and is, generally, important after physiological needs including food, water, shelter

and safety needs are met, but is important to establish prior to actualization, or achieving

one's goals or personal potential. Thus, in thinking about educational contexts, it is not

surprising that fostering a sense of belonging among students is critical to student

achievement and success.

In their work, Deci et al. (1991) discuss that there are basic psychological needs that

are important for human life and are sufficient to motivate behavior for desired

educational outcomes (i.e. self-determination). These include the need for competence,

relatedness, and autonomy. Relatedness, in their discussions of education, relates to the

need for closeness with a significant adult, such as a teacher (Deci et al., 1991). They cite

numerous studies, which support that in social contexts that do not allow for these basic

needs to be met, there will be diminished motivation and ultimately poorer performance

for students.

The work of Baumeister and Leary (1995) also aims to assess the hypothesis of

sense of belonging as a fundamental human motive. Their review of data suggests that a

sense of belonging impacts behavior, health, and wellness and is shown to be a "powerful

factor in shaping human thought" (Baumeister, 1995, p. 505), or cognition as well as

emotion, or "to regulate behavior so as to form and maintain social bonds (p. 508). They go

on to show evidence that suggests that a lack of belonging has significant, negative

consequences. Among the empirical data cited is Durkheim's research on suicide, which is

connected to a lack of social integration (Durkheim as cited in Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

From their analysis of empirical evidence, Baumeister and Leary (1995) make a strong case

for the sense of belonging a critical factor in understanding human behavior and motivation. In fact, they state that belongingness may be one of the most central theoretical constructs available for understanding human nature (p. 522).

**Sense of Belonging and the School Community**

While the work of Deci et al. (1991) and Baumeister and Leary (1995) establish a foundation for understanding belonging as it relates to motivation, others further explore the work and show the impact on educational outcomes in K-12 school environments. Goodenow (1992) focused her research on youth and findings revealed that adolescents gain much of their motivation for academics based on the perceived supportiveness of the school community. Further, she found that a sense of belonging and support was significantly associated with educational outcomes, including effort and grades (Goodenow, 1993). Additionally, Osterman (2000) reviewed a large number of empirical studies, which explore if belongingness is important in the educational context and how students experience community in the school setting. Osterman's research reveals strong and consistent findings that "students who experience acceptance are more highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school" (p. 359). While these studies show support for the importance of belongingness in K-12 contexts, the research discussed in the next section explores sense of belonging and underrepresented students in higher education contexts.

**Sense of Belonging and Underrepresented Students**

As previously discussed, Hurtado and Carter (1997) are often cited in studies that seek to explore belongingness in higher education contexts. Their research sought to challenge traditional understanding of the student departure puzzle, which focused heavily

on social integration as these models, established on Tinto's (1975; 1993) work, do not

account for the cultural differences and experiences of underrepresented minority

students. They contend that in order to understand how students of color experience the

institution, how they might perceive their environment, and how that impacts how they

engage with the institution, it is important to explore their sense of belonging (Hurtado &

Carter, 1997). The model developed and used for this study considers a student's

background characteristics, institutional characteristics, including institutional size and

type. Further, it discusses the impact of the transition experience of students as well as

their perception of the campus racial climate (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). The model suggests

that all of these factors are predictors of students' sense of belonging in college and has

implications for their success.

Building on the work of Hurtado and Carter (1997), another study explores how

students' diversity experiences before and during their first year of college impact the

transition and sense of belonging of students in their second year (Locks, Hurtado,

Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). The findings of this study reveal that though students of color

had more precollege experiences with individuals from backgrounds different than their

own than did the White participants, all students expressed anxiety in interacting across

culture (Locks et al., 2008). The findings for students of color and White students have

similar patterns in other ways as well. Both students of color and White students who have

positive interactions with diverse peers show a greater sense of belonging within the

institution and, "the perception of racial tensions had a negative impact on sense of

belonging for White students and students of color" (Locks et al, 2008, p. 272).

Additionally, the findings from this study show that the quality of the interaction with

36

peers from diverse backgrounds more strongly impacts sense of belonging than the time

spent with individuals from different backgrounds (Locks et al., 2008). This finding

suggests that colleges and universities would benefit from creating opportunities for

meaningful, respectful interaction and exchange of ideas and experiences between and

among different cultural groups.

In an experimental design study, researchers tested the relationship between racial

background, sense of belonging and motivation. Walton and Cohen (2007) approach their

study from the lens that social belonging is a basic human motivation, which is a theory

that has been established by prior research (Deci et al., 1991; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

They argue that in environments where achievement is important, individuals are sensitive

to the quality of their social connections (Walton & Cohen, 2007). The research presented

in this study seeks to understand if the sensitivity to social connections or belonging is

more important to people who are part of a social identity group that is negatively

characterized in the achievement-oriented environment, specifically the college

environment. They contend that fitting in or feeling that one belongs may have more

impact on students of color than their White peers in an academic setting (Walton & Cohen,

2007). In the first of two experiments, students were made aware that they may have few

friends in their academic program. Black students' feelings of belonging were impacted,

White students' feelings were not impacted by the possibility of few friends in the program

(Walton & Cohen, 2007). In the second experiment, an intervention was used to suggest

that all college students experience doubt, not only minority students. This treatment had a

positive impact on the achievement of Black students, but did not impact the White

students in the study. The findings suggest that belonging uncertainty can negatively

impact a minority students' perception of him or herself and therefore, addressing

subjective beliefs about disparities in achievement could help students of color resolve

concerns and lead to greater achievement in the academic environment (Walton & Cohen,

2007).

Ostrove and Long (2007) seek to understand if social class matters as it relates to

sense of belonging at a predominantly White liberal arts college. Their study set out to

discover if addressing low-income students' sense of belonging in college could be a key to

improving college completion rates. Their research showed that sense of belonging was a

mediator between social class and success in college. Those students from a lower social

class showed less of a sense of belonging than higher-class peers. And, sense of belonging

predicted social and academic adjustment, quality of experience in college, and academic

performance (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Though this study does not account for other identity

variables such as age, gender, or race/ethnicity, it does indicate that individuals from

families who have less experience with college may encounter challenges fitting in within

university communities as some of the other research establishes as it relates to race.

Finally, Vaccaro and Newman (2016) explored how students of minoritized (defined

in their study as belonging to at least one historically underrepresented social identity

group by race, sexual orientation, ability, or religion) and privileged identities defined and

understood belonging. They found consistently that students from both groups defined

belonging in college as feeling comfortable and fitting in. However, they also found that a

sense of belonging among students of minoritized identities also included a feeling of

respect and safety, which was not identified by the students of privileged identities in the

study (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Furthermore, their study identified authenticity as a key

ingredient for belonging among students with minoritized identies. These students needed

to fit into organizations and communities as their authentic selves in order to feel a sense

of belonging (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). This study supports the prior research on the

importance of sense of belonging for motivation and positive outcomes in academic

environments, but it also shows the need to consider the distinctive ways in which students

of color and students of other underrepresented identities experience belonging.

**Sense of Belonging, Higher Education, and Persistence**

More recent work that extends the discussion of sense of belonging in the higher

education literature notes that sense of belonging (the psychological dimension of

integration), as a concept and an important indicator of student persistence, has not been

as well-integrated into higher education discourse as it has in other fields such as

psychology, physical and mental health, and nursing (Hausemann, Schofield, & Woods,

2007; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow & Salomone, 2003; Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-

Wann, 2015; Strayhorn, 2012).  There are also a number of studies among elementary,

middle, and high school students showing a positive relationship between sense of

belonging and good academic outcomes (Osterman, 2000). Also, recent research has

developed and tested the concept of sense of belonging in higher education and confirmed

that it is a predictor of student persistence in college (Hausemann et al., 2007; Hoffman et

al., 2007).

In his book focused on college students' sense of belonging, Strayhorn (2012) used

original and existing literature and found the impact of sense of belonging to be significant

for student success among diverse student identities, including first-year students,

Latino/as, gay students, Black males, students of color in STEM fields, and graduate

students. Additionally, Hurtado et al. (2015) have continued to extend her frequently cited study with Carter (1997) with a recent study, which connects experiences of discrimination and bias at a predominantly White institution to feelings of belonging. They found that the more bias students experience and the more they witness discrimination or hearing disparaging remarks, the less they engage in the community or feel validated (Hurtado et al., 2015). However, they note the power of faculty and staff to help foster a sense of belonging, stating that feeling validated by individuals at the institution "can fortify students against discriminatory practices and help them feel included as part of their campus communities" (Hurtado et al., 2015, p. 72).

In their advocacy for continued research on the concept of belonging in higher education, Hurtado et al., (2015) underscore the strong connections that have been established through research between the campus racial climate and sense of belonging for students of color in college. In light of this established research, they note that, "assumptions of privilege embedded in academic and social activities go unrecognized when we assume all students have access to them, when in fact, students weigh these 'opportunities' against the realities of their lived experiences" (p. 61). Higher education researchers and practitioners would do well to consider how the environment, activities, and actions of individuals at traditionally White institutions privilege White norms and values, rather than interrogating policies and practices and seeking inclusion for all students.

## Campus Racial Climate at Traditionally White Institutions

Given that the specific experiences of students of color was largely left out of early discussions of college student success, and the well-established literature that shows the

positive impact of a sense of belonging on educational success, exploring the literature on

campus racial climate can be very instructive in developing a deeper understanding of how

students of color experience traditionally White institutional environments. This research

extends Tinto's theory of student departure and offers an expanded lens for understanding

the experience of students from diverse backgrounds. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000)

define the campus racial climate as the "overall racial environment," but it is also used to

generally assess how people of color feel within their environment (Museus, Ravello, &

Vega, 2012, p. 29). Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1998) provide a

framework for understanding campus climate with four dimensions including, "an

institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of various racial/ethnic groups, its

structural diversity in terms of numerical representation of various racial/ethnic groups,

the psychological climate of perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and the

behavioral climate dimension, characterized by intergroup relations on campus" (p. 282).

Their framework moves past the idea that merely numerical representation is enough for

positive campus climate, but rather, the multiple dimensions identified are critical and

interconnected and need to be addressed in an effort to impact positive change related to

racial climate within institutions of higher education. More recent research on campus

racial climate has added a fifth element to the framework originally put forth by Hurtado et

al. (1998). This revision clarifies that structural diversity should actually be considered

compositional diversity (numerical representation) and that a fifth dimension,

structural/organizational, which is defined as climate for diversity as "reflected in the

curriculum; in campus decision- making practices related to budget allocations, reward

structures, hiring practices, admissions practices, and tenure decisions; and in other

important structures and processes that guide the day-to-day 'business' of our campuses"

(Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005, p. 18). Research on the psychological and behavior

dimensions of campus climate are highlighted in the following sections.

**Psychological Dimension of Campus Racial Climate**

Despite increases in the enrollment of students of color in college in recent years,

they are still less likely to feel that they "fit in" to campus community as well as White peers

(Hurtado, 1992; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Sedlacek, 1999), and addressing concerns about fit,

or the psychological dimension of campus racial climate, may be the most difficult to

understand and respond to for institutions of higher education. According to Hurtado et al.,

"the psychological dimension of the campus racial climate involves individuals' views of

group relations, institutional responses to diversity, perceptions of discrimination or racial

conflict, and attitudes toward those from other racial/ethnic backgrounds than one's own"

(1998, p. 289). Some colleges and universities have worked to increase structural diversity,

yet then view and respond to the increases in diversity as a burden to be dealt with (Smith,

Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). As Yosso (2005) discusses, some educators take a deficit

position when considering students of color preparation, skills, and possibilities for

achievement in education. This deficit approach, Yosso argues, is a common form of racism

in education today (2005, p. 75). She asserts that the preparation, knowledge, skills, and

networks that contemporary education values privileges middle class Whites and

marginalizes people of color. Looking specifically at Black males in the academy, Harper

(2009) notes, "anyone who takes the time to read about them could confidently conclude

that Black male undergraduates are troubled, their future is bleak, they all do poorly, and

there is little that can be done to reverse longstanding outcomes disparities that render

42

them among the least likely to succeed in college" (pp. 699-700). This deficit orientation impacts the way that institutions consider Black male students, what is expected of them inside and outside the classroom by faculty and administrators, and ultimately the campus racial climate. Though Harper's work described relates specifically to Black men, the deficit thinking is prevalent amongst most students of color, especially low-income students (Yosso, 2005).

The experience for students of color at traditionally White colleges and universities is compounded by other psychological elements, which impact their perception of self, the campus community, and their opportunities for success. Just as higher education administrators have been exposed to stereotypes, media images, and rhetoric that supports deficit thinking about students of color, young people themselves also are aware of and, at times, buy in to these notions (Smith et al., 2007). Studies also show that Black and Latino students believe that they will have more academic difficulties than their White peers and perceive that their academic preparedness falls short (Loo & Rolison, 1986). Steele (2002) refers to this as stereotype threat. Students of color fall prey to stereotypes and deficit thinking similar to that of educators and college administrators.

Studies indicate that the fears of a lack of academic preparedness are often reinforced through the academic experiences of students of color. In their article titled, A Fly in the Buttermilk, Davis et al. (2004), described the common feeling among black undergraduates that they were perceived to be less capable by peers and faculty. Students developed strategies to prove their engagement and academic worthiness, such as sitting in the front of the classroom. The perception that they were viewed as less capable certainly impacts a student's perception of self and also their sense of belonging within the

43

community.  Additionally, students' sense of belonging on a college campus is dependent on the ways in which they see themselves represented in the curriculum.

In their analysis of fifteen years of research on campus racial climate, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that students of color did not identify any spaces, which reflected their identity outside of cultural centers. The following quote by a college student participant accurately sums up the sentiment:

> Everything is so White. The concerts: White musicians. The activities: catered to White culture. The football games: a ton of drunk White folks. All the books we read in class: White authors and viewpoints. Students on my left, right, in front and in back of me in my classes: White, White, White, White. I feel like there is nothing for us here besides the [cultural] center, but yet [this university] claims to be so big on diversity. That is the biggest white lie I have ever heard (p. 18).

The lack of representation of student voice and experience outside of the white experience and white norms is often referred to as the hidden curriculum. Jay (2003) discusses that even institutions of higher education with good intentions for increasing diversity and multicultural student engagement can see futile results of their efforts if students of color are not validated by the curriculum or experiences inside the classroom.

One final element of the psychological dimension to unpack in this section is the differences in perceptions among white students and students of color as it relates to their perception of an inclusive campus community. Both white students and students of color perceive a lack of effort on the part of colleges and universities when it comes to helping students to engage in conversations about race and racism. Harper and Hurtado's (2007) analysis reveals that students expressed an interest in cross-race dialogue, but felt that the institution needed to do more to support them through discussions on such a sensitive topic.  Despite a shared interest in exploring issues related to race and racism among

students of color and white students, numerous studies report differences in perceptions of satisfaction with the campus climate (Loo & Rolinson, 1986; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). In most cases, White students were aware of issues of racial discrimination and intolerance, but they underestimated the negative impact of these experiences on students' satisfaction among racially underrepresented students.

**Behavioral Dimension of Campus Racial Climate**

The behavioral dimension of campus racial climate also has important implications for student of color engagement and integration with this institution and its members. Hurtado et al. (1998) describe this dimension consisting of the quantity and quality of the interactions between individuals from different racial/ethnic backgrounds as well as the relations and intergroup dynamics. Pike and Kuh (2006) discuss that recent increases in the representation of students of color in college in the United States will inevitably increase the opportunities for interaction between individuals from differing racial/ethnic groups. However, Hurtado et al. (1998) caution that an increase in structural diversity does not mean improved intergroup relations. In fact, Pike and Kuh (2006) found that the perceived supportiveness of the campus community is not related to the diversity of the student body. Furthermore, scholars argue that a lack of intentional opportunities for interaction could result negative consequences to campus climate (Hurtado et al., 1998; Rankin & Reason, 2005). This suggests that the quality of the interaction between and among different racial groups is important. Several studies note that since students will be likely to stay amongst groups that they are familiar with, colleges and universities can and should provide opportunities both within and outside the classroom to foster intentional,

sustained, and facilitated conversations about race and racism in order to improve campus interaction across race and to further develop students as they prepare to live and work in an increasingly diverse society (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). Though her research study was not centered on higher education, Lewis (2001) supports this notion in discussing her findings from a study of an elementary school speaks to the color-blind ideology, or the avoidance of discussion of race, in predominantly white schools. She asserts that schools have a responsibility to address racial issues, as there are few other places in society where racial understandings can be challenged. Though there is a significant support for colleges and universities providing space for racial dialogue, some scholars contend that intergroup dialogue benefits Whites more than people of color given their lack of awareness and interaction with racial minorities (Smith et al., 2007), thus perpetuating the benefit to White students above communities of color.

There is also research that emphasizes the value of safe spaces for students of color, such as campus cultural centers. Research indicates that African-American students who do not establish a strong community of support at predominantly White colleges and universities are more likely to experience feelings of discomfort and isolation and are less like to persist (Guiffrida, 2003). Findings from Harper and Quaye (2007) also support the importance of cultural/ethnic organizations and cultural centers at TWI as important, safe spaces for students to develop an authentic sense of self, while also finding support and affirmation for their identity. Similarly, Black students emphasized the comfort they felt in having other Black students in their classrooms and the importance of having a Black professor (Davis et al., 2004). Ultimately, finding spaces that feel like "home" on a campus that can feel alienating is important for many students of color. Therefore, campus spaces

such as cultural centers (Patton, 2006) and in-group opportunities for community in order to feel supported and understood are important for student success and persistence in college (Tatum, 2003; Villapando, 2003).

In his review of the past two decades of research on campus racial climates, Museus (2014) summarizes and describes three broad findings that are well-supported in the research: 1) Students of all cultural backgrounds experience unwelcome or hostile campus environments at times, but this is much more common for students of color than for White students; 2) Students of color often report difficulty with the adjustment to college and experience tension negotiating personal culture and institutional culture; and 3) Evidence shows that the campus racial climate impacts adjustment, engagement, and success of students of color in meaningful ways (Museus, 2014). He states, "a substantial body of existing empirical research offers compelling evidence that the racial and cultural realities within college and university environments shape the experiences and outcomes of racially diverse student populations" (Museus, 2014, p. 192).

**Racial Climate and Liberal Arts Colleges**

While there is not extensive research on the experiences of students of color generally, or the campus racial climate specifically, at small, liberal arts colleges, that which does exist generally suggests that they are more positive environments, from a racial climate perspective, than large, often public, institutions. Hurtado (1992) examined perceptions of the campus racial climate among a large dataset at multiple institutions. While only 12% respondents believed that racial discrimination was no longer a problem, four-year private colleges had the most positive results overall on racial climate measures, scoring better than four-year public colleges as well as four-year private and public

47

universities (Hurtado, 1992). It was only in the area of recruitment of diverse students and faculty that universities scored higher than small, private colleges. Additionally, this research showed that students of all racial backgrounds perceived lower racial tension at institutions that were very student-centered (Hurtado, 1992). The fact that most small liberal arts colleges take great strides to be student-centered may explain the generally positive responses in this assessment of racial climate.

In one of the only studies on campus racial climate at a small liberal arts college, the researchers studied the experiences of both Black and White students a highly selective institution in the late 1980s where Black students comprised three to five percent of the student enrollment (McClelland & Auster, 1990). The results indicated that the majority of both Black and White students felt that relations between people of different racial backgrounds were friendly at school functions (70% of Black students; 93% of White students) and at parties (75% of Black students; 90% of White students), though perceived friendliness was significantly higher for White students (McClelland & Auster, 1990). The general view of race relations on-campus was less positive with only 55% of Black students reporting "friendly" regarding race relations compared with nearly 70% of White students (McClelland & Auster, 1990). This researcher digs deeper into willingness of Black and White students to have close friendships and relationships with a student of another racial background. The findings reveal that Black students were much more willing to have close relationships with White students than vice versa (McClelland & Auster, 1990). Overall, the findings suggest that though on the surface, race relations at this liberal arts college seemed generally friendly, a closer look at a willingness of White students to build meaningful relationships suggests more opposition or tension.

From these two studies, it is unclear if small liberal arts colleges truly offer an environment that is more conducive to an inclusive campus racial climate. While the Hurtado (1992) study suggests some promising findings, there has not been enough research at small colleges to make any significant claims. One of the challenges, certainly, that is revealed by both studies is that highly selective liberal arts colleges often have small enrollments of students of color (McClelland & Auster, 1990) and that institutional priorities towards increasing the representation of students of color and faculty of color is less evident at these institutions as compared with public and private universities (Hurtado, 1992). A limitation of the campus racial climate research is that the majority of the research has been conducted a mid-size or large research institutions, which have very different institution contexts and environments when compared with small colleges. Further campus racial climate research at small liberal arts colleges is needed, especially given that these institutions are less culturally diverse and are often situated in predominantly White, rural communities (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

**Student Achievement and Belonging at Historically Black Colleges**

The literature presented here shows the challenges that many students face in traditionally White institution environments and that these negative experiences lead to a lack of affirmation and belonging, which likely impacts academic outcomes. In comparison, the research at historically Black colleges and universities have shown the Black students experience more academic and social integration on their campus, perceive more faculty, staff, and peer support, and the HBCU environments produce better outcomes for Black students (Allen, 1992; Berger & Milem, 2000; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Gasman et al., 2007; Palmer & Young, 2010). According to data from the National Negro College Fund as

cited in Gasman et al. (2007), historically Black colleges and universities make up three percent of all institutions of higher education in the United States, but they enroll 14% of all Black students. HBCUs have, historically and currently, suffered from financial challenges and inequities in state and federal funding as compared with traditionally White institutions. Despite the resource challenges, however, these institutions graduate 28% of all Black undergraduate students, which is a disproportionally high number based on enrollment (Gasman et al., 2007). Additionally, HBCUs provide a better pipeline for Black students to PhD and medical programs as compared with TWI (Gasman et al., 2007).

The research that compares HBCU and TWI environments shows that Black students achieve better outcomes in regards to developing a positive self-concept as well as academic achievement (Allen, 1992; Berger & Milem, 2000). Allen's (1992) study reveals that Black students attending HBCUs had higher grade point averages than those attending TWI, while research by Berger and Milem (2000) found that Black students attending historically Black colleges were also more likely than their Black peers at TWI to rate themselves as having high academic ability. Encountering negative stereotypes inside and outside of the classroom can be draining for Black students at TWI (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002), which detracts from the energy that these students can put towards their studies. Additionally, the positive environment described as a "family" or "home" at HBCU fosters feelings of support as well as increased engagement for Black Students (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Findings from Palmer and Young (2010) aligns with the prior research and indicates that strong connections with faculty, supportive administrators, and opportunities for mentorship were all key components to the HBCU environment that fostered success for Black students.

**Impact of Intersecting Identities**

While much of the research presented here has a focus on the experiences of students of color generally, and Black students specifically, central to critical race theory in education is the recognition of the intersections of identity and an acknowledgement of how racism, sexism, and classism intersect and impact an individual's experience society (Crenshaw, 1991). Additionally, a student's sense of self and perception of their environment is impacted by their various social identities including race, ethnicity, social class, religion, and sexual identity (Jones, 2009; Museus & Griffin, 2011). For example, in their study of the experiences of Black lesbians at an HBCU in the southeastern part of the U.S., Patton and Simmons (2008) found that though their female participants did not experience the racial discrimination or microaggressions often experienced by Black students at TWI, they did experience campus climate concerns related to gender and sexual orientation. The women in the study discussed their need for triple consciousness and a mindfulness of holding three oppressed identities. Furthermore, they discussed the feelings of being an outsider in the Black community at their institution due to their lesbian identities. The authors state, "[i]n order to find a sense of belonging in a campus environment that did not acknowledge or genuinely validate their sexual identity, they also made their sexual identity seem less important" (2008, p. 209).  Likewise, Black, gay males at a predominantly White institution discussed having two strikes against them in their collegiate environment (Strayhorn, Blackwood, & DeVita, 2010). They experienced both racism and homophobia and struggled to find authentic community feeling as though they did not neatly fit in among either Black affinity groups or LGBT affinity groups on-campus.

These studies on campus climate and multiple identities underscore the importance

of having a mindfulness of intersecting identities in educational research. As Museus and

Griffin (2011) persuade, "intersectionality promotes a greater understanding of how

converging identities contribute to inequality. The failure of higher education researchers

to make the intersections of social identities and groups more central in research and

discourse limits the existing level of understanding of and progress in addressing equity

issues in higher education" (p. 10).

## III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

I approach this research project with the acknowledgment that I have a stake in the outcome of this work. My observations and hunches over the years as a practitioner in higher education has guided my interest and informed the values that I bring with me to this research. Furthermore, I recognize the value of the possible findings to make a difference in the effectiveness that I can have personally with college students and what I hope might be infused into the culture of the institution. In equal measure, I approach this project with a recognition that the experiences of students of color have often been left out of discussions of college persistence and success. While there is plenty of research that evaluates the success of Black students in college, less research allows the students to co-construct the findings with their personal understanding of the college experience as the central focus. Therefore, I advance this qualitative research study using a social constructivism paradigm and a critical race theory framework and with a commitment to critical self-reflexivity.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) discuss that the purpose of qualitative research is to interpret the world, and specifically, for the researcher to attempt to make sense of the meanings that people make of the world around them (p. 3). Qualitative research generally occurs in the natural environment and relies on the senses (see, hear, feel, etc.) of the researcher and the participants as well as the personal interaction between them (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). My interest in my work and in my academic endeavors has always been to try to understand an individual's perspective or experience in a new and better way, which makes interpretive nature of qualitative research a natural fit for me.

The task of the qualitative researcher is to appropriately interpret the experiences of the participants, and the world around them, which is difficult and requires the researcher to be mindful of how their own lived experience and assumptions interface with the data collection process. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument and the data does not speak for itself; rather it is interpreted through the lens of the researcher (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 34). Therefore, taking the steps to pursue this research project requires adherence to the standards of quality and the professional ethics that have been set out for the field. The discussion to follow will explain the process I use as well as my assumptions and acknowledgments for the project.

## Philosophical Approach

### Social Constructivism

"Stating a knowledge claim means that researchers start a project with certain assumptions about how they will learn and what they will learn about their inquiry" (Creswell, 2003, p. 6). At a very basic level, my perspective begins with notion that the human world cannot be understood objectively (Patton, 2002); rather, individuals are constantly interpreting and constructing their understanding of the world around them, and this understanding is inherently subjective (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). Social constructivists believe in subjective knowledge, which contrasts their perspective from the positivist or post-positivist paradigm, which seeks objectivity and foundational or probable truth (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002).

In the third edition of their chapter on the guiding paradigms in qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (2005) acknowledge that there has been some blending of the various paradigms as the landscape of social science research has evolved. Their updated

54

discussion begins to separate a "new paradigm" perspective (the interpretivist/postmodern critical theory, constructivist, and participatory) that evolved in recent years and can be differentiated from the positivist/post-positivist paradigm. Their argument is that the new paradigm perspectives share axiomatic elements or essentially, values (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 201). This is important for the discussion of my orientation to the research as my philosophy pushes the boundaries of traditional discussions of social constructivism somewhat, which is consistent with evolution of the new paradigm alignment discussed by Guba and Lincoln (2005). Consistent with the constructivism standpoint, this research takes the position that one does not find or discover knowledge; rather they construct it as they make meaning of their lives (Schwandt, 2007, p. 38). A claim of knowledge from a social constructivism view recognizes that meaning, or truth, is varied and constantly evolving as human beings interact with the world around them (Creswell, 2003). That is relevant for this research since the experience of Black college students will inevitably change and evolve as they transition in the environment, mature, grow, and as their understanding of the historic and contemporary context progresses. The constructivist also recognizes the dialectical relationship between researcher and participants and their mutual roles as co-creators of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Social constructivism acknowledges that through the research process, the researcher's socially constructed meanings of the world become intertwined with the meanings of the participants, so "they 'position themselves' in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (Creswell, 2003, p. 9).

In tandem with the social constructivist approach, this research employs elements of the critical theory paradigm, which brings an empowerment or change-oriented aim to the research. The critical theory paradigm recognizes that knowledge is "shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 195) and was developed as a response to claims that the constructivist paradigm did not push enough in empowering or emancipating marginalized groups (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, research from this perspective has a goal of social transformation, contributions towards equity and justice, and prioritizes a collaborative effort between the researcher and participants with an important goal of ensuring that the further marginalization of participants does not occur due to the study (Creswell, 2003, p. 10). In sum, the philosophical underpinnings of this research are shaped by subjective and intersubjective knowledge, a call to action or change-oriented research agenda, shared control with participants, and an acknowledgment of the antifoundational nature of truth (Guba & Lincoln, 2005); all of which align with the critical race theory framework that provides the theoretical lens for this study.

**Validity, Self-Reflexivity, Student Voice**

Thus far, this chapter and the prior chapter have outlined the philosophical and theoretical stances that establish the framework for studying how Black students experience the racial climate at traditionally White liberal arts colleges. Next, we turn to the specific methodology that us used as part of the design for this research. Throughout the discussion thus far, the themes of participant voice, researcher reflexivity, and efforts to ensure ethical research are discussed as it relates to the design of this research.

Adhering to the criteria of good research as established in the field and based on a constructivist perspective, this study seeks to ensure that the research questions guide the design of the study (Creswell, 1998; Howe & Eisenhardt, 1990) and that the study was conducted according to generally agreed upon norms for qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Additionally, Guba and Lincoln (2005) discuss the quality criteria for research from the constructivist paradigm as being trustworthy, authentic, and a catalyst for action (p. 196). Specifically, they state that research is trustworthy to the degree that it establishes: 1) fairness in that there is balance in sharing the perspective of participants in the study; 2) ontological and educative authenticity in that there is new understanding or awareness as a result of the research; 3) catalytic and tactical authenticity in that the research motivates action by the participants, the researcher, and/or others based on the research findings (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Others discuss the goodness or trustworthiness of constructivist research based on the efforts that are made to honor participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) and to be engaged in reflexivity, or reflect on how "one's own experiences and background affect what one understands and how one acts in the world, including acts of inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 546). However, while the goals of self-reflexivity and honoring participants are central to the philosophical approach to this study, there are important strategies that must be employed throughout the process. Among those that are recommended, I use triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing, which will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections of this chapter (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

**Methodology**

**A Study of Multiple Cases**

      This study uses a comparative (multiple) case study approach informed by multiple

philosophical and theoretical perspectives as described earlier. I believe that designing this

study as a comparative case study using multiple institutional cases adds value to the

overall impact of the study. Merriam (1998) describes case studies as particularistic

(focused or small scale), descriptive, heuristic or bringing about new insight, and as

inductive and leading to new discovery (pp. 11-13).  Case study research is typically

discussed as an in-depth understanding of a bounded system (or case) that through

multiple forms of data (interviews, document analysis, observations), seeks to understand

an activity, process, event, or individual (Creswell, 2007; 2008; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014)

states that, "case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social

phenomenon" (p. 4) and "because you want to understand a real-world case and assume

that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to

your case" (p. 16).  Furthermore, Yin (2014) affirms that case study is a comprehensive

method of research, which includes specific techniques and approaches, but is a method

that can also embrace differing theoretical and epistemological perspectives, which provide

direction for the data collection and analysis (p. 17).  Case study, then, is an ideal method

for this research because it provides structure for exploring the breadth of the

phenomenon in question (Black students' experiences with campus racial climate) while

providing methodological characteristics to understand the phenomenon at a particular

type of institution (liberal arts college). Conducting this research as a multiple case study

offers the opportunity to identify commonalities of the phenomenon within the liberal arts

college environment, while also providing the opportunity to contrast how particular environments, contexts, policies, or programs impact the phenomenon.

Stake (2005) describes two differing types of case studies including the intrinsic case study, in which a researcher "wants a better understanding of this particular case" as compared with the instrumental case study, in which the "case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else" (p. 445). The design of this study is consistent with the instrumental case study and the examination of the activities and contexts of three separate cases (liberal arts colleges) are considered in order to shed light on the racial climate issue for Black students. Stake (2005) discusses the instrumental case study extended to several cases as a multiple case study, which represents the design of this study. It is a design that can lead to "better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about still a larger collection of cases" (Stake, 2005, p. 446). Therefore, I see value in conducting the research at multiple institutional sites so some comparison can be considered and shared among the research findings. Doing so enhances and adds depth to the understanding, or what social constructivists refer to as verstehen (Patton, 2002), even though the goal is not to use the findings to make broad generalizations beyond these institutions or similarly typed and located liberal arts colleges.

Additionally, I see analysis of Black students' experiences with the campus racial climate at liberal arts colleges as an important piece of how this study contributes to the larger body of literature. As previously discussed, Hurtado's (1992) comprehensive study on campus racial climate revealed that small, private colleges had the most positive responses to feelings about the campus racial climate. Yet, there has been very little

59

research on the campus racial climate at small, private colleges since that time.

Furthermore, in their meta-analysis of studies on campus racial climate between 1992 and

2007, Harper and Hurtado (2007) report only one study that is both qualitative and

conducted at multiple institutions (Solórzano et al., 2000). As a result, I believe a research

study using case study methodology and informed by the perspectives of critical race

theory and social constructivism, as well as cross-case analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

of multiple college sites, leads to more robust findings and contributes to the existing

literature on this topic.

<div align="center">**Research Plan**</div>

This section explores the research plan that was developed and used in alignment

with multiple case study methodology (Stake, 2005; 2006; Yin, 2014) including a

discussion of the data collection methods, the process for data analysis, efforts that were

taken to ensure the validity of the findings, as well as a description of the institutional cases

and the student participants. While case study does not prescribe particular methods for

collecting evidence, it is recommended that case study research include multiple sources of

evidence (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). For this study, the data sources include interviews,

observation, and analysis of documents and institutional data.

**Data Sources**

***Individual Interviews***

When it comes to qualitative research, in-depth interviewing is the "hallmark" data

collection tool (Madison, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). This is often true among case

study research as well (Yin, 2014) and the design of this research ensures that there are

multiple students (n=14) among each institutional case (n=3) who participated, and

therefore provide multiple opportunities to confirm, or to identify nuance, in the evidence. Given that my goal for this research is to privilege the voice of the student participants, in-depth and face-to-face interviews are essential. Rossman and Rallis describe the value of interviews stating, "interviewing takes you into participants' worlds, at least as far as they can (or choose to) verbally related what is in their minds" (2012, p. 176). A primary goal involves building appropriate rapport with the participants so that they are willing to be honest and authentic in their discussion of their racialized experiences in college and the racial climate on-campus.

After receiving permission to conduct the research through the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois-Chicago as well as the human subjects review process at each of the three case study institutions, I enlisted the help of a staff member at the institution to reach out to students and invite them to participate in the research if they met the requirements for the study. In order to participate, students were required to be: 1) at least 19 years old, 2) sophomore, junior, or senior standing, 3) attending one of the three case study institutions, and 4) self-identify as Black or African American. The institutional staff contacts sent the participant recruitment email (see Appendix A) to students on their campus through email lists and student organization listservs. After the recruitment information was disseminated to students, I received follow-up emails, text messages, and phone calls from students who were interested in participating in the study. In most cases, I called the student and spoke with them over the phone to schedule the date, time, and location of the interview. In a few cases, the scheduling was done via email or text message instead. Every participant who reached out to express interest in participating in the study did, in fact, participate in the interview. I met with all students on

their campus. For each interview, I invited the student to suggest a location to conduct the face-to-face interview that was convenient, preferred, and comfortable for them. At Green College, the interviews took place in a private staff office. At North University, the interviews were conducted in a conference room in the student center, in a lounge in the multicultural center, or in the lounge of the Black student organization house. At Prairie College, the interviews were conducted in two different study lounges, one in the student center and one in an academic building.

The interview was designed to foster dialogue between myself and the participants. I spent time getting to know the participants even before we began the interview. I shared information about my academic program and my professional role. I encouraged participants to ask me questions about the goals of the study, my identity, and my interest in this research throughout the interview, and the entire research process, as well. Since my professional role is that of educator and advocate, I found myself wanting to assist the student participants with navigating challenges that they described even after the interview ended. I had to actively hold back from taking this step in a couple of cases, though in some, I did recommend that they report incidents of bias to campus staff and I gave encouragement to a couple of students who were worried about their ability to persist in college. I also gave my business card to all participants and encouraged them to follow-up with me with any additional questions, concerns, or if there was any way I could assist them in the future. I am hopeful that the students found their participation with the study as a positive experience. Confidentiality was maintained by providing each participant the chance to identify a pseudonym, which is used in the reporting of the findings. Furthermore, each institution is identified with a pseudonym and names of organizations,

buildings, centers, faculty, and staff are also included only in general terms within the findings.

Although Yin (2014) discusses that case study interviews are most often fluid and conversational, I recognized the challenge of the unstructured interview for me, as a novice researcher. Therefore, I used the interview guide approach (see Appendix B for the interview protocol) discussed by Patton (2002), which identifies specified topics and subject areas, with some standardized questions as well, but also provides space for the interviewer to explore in more depth through additional probes and follow-up questions. The interview also incorporated the Patton Model and included questions that illicit behavior/experience, opinions/values, feelings, knowledge of the phenomenon (i.e. campus racial climate), as well as background/demographics (Madison, 2005). The same protocol was used for each interview and the individual interview session with each student participant lasted approximately 90 minutes. In addition to administering an informed consent document (see Appendix C) during the session, students also completed a participant survey (see Appendix D), which included demographic information and provided the opportunity for me to consider intersecting identities as part of the data analysis process.

My goal with the semi-structured interviews was to gain insight into the lived realities of the student participants. The interviews explored several different domains, which connected back to the guiding research questions, and elicited detailed descriptions of the participant's social and academic experiences in college, their engagement and interactions within the campus environment, the perceptions and feelings associated with these interactions, as well as their interpretation of their college experiences. The themes

that emerged were considered in light of CRT, and mapped onto the analytic frameworks,

Hurtado et al.'s (1998) framework of campus racial climate and Strayhorn's (2012) model

of college students' sense of belonging, which provided a guide for this study.

Consideration of how intersecting identities impacted a student's experience of the campus

racial climate is incorporated into the analysis as well. The data collected from the

individual interviews provides information on the shared experiences with the campus

racial climate and shared spaces of belonging for students from the same institution.

However, the findings to follow primarily focus on the common themes among all the

institutions and provide insight into how the campus racial climate at Midwestern

traditionally White liberal arts colleges impact a sense of belonging for Black students.

### *Observation, Artifacts, and Documentation*

I spent at least three days at each of the three institutions. My time there was

structured around the interviews with students, but I also engaged in the campus

environment as much as possible. I independently toured the campus and visited the

student center, library, athletic center, and academic buildings. I also ate meals in the

campus cafeteria and cafes. The observation component of the research provided an

opportunity to develop an understanding of the environmental context and provided

another source of evidence to consider along with the interview data (Yin, 2014). During

my time observing the campus environment, I was able to get a sense of where and how

students, faculty, and staff at the institutions interact with one another, as well as observe

and consider how the visible representations and environmental spaces might be relevant

to discussions of the campus racial climate.

Related to observation, I kept field notes and memos in an effort to, "turn what you see and hear into data" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 194). It is recommended for qualitative researchers to be very mindful of taking detailed notes, or descriptive data, on what is observed in the environment, including concrete details about who or what was observed, as well as the symbols observed, and other critical pieces of information (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). These field notes are associated with researcher reflexivity and involve the researcher noting "emotional reactions to events, analytic insights, questions about meaning" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 194) throughout the research process. My field notes were used to record my responses to the campus environment. In particular, I made note of what I observed in terms of representations of cultural diversity through posters, symbols, and artwork displayed throughout the campus. I also made note of how I observed students, faculty, and staff interacting within the campus environment, including how students of differing racial identities (based on my visual ascription) were interacting in campus spaces such as the cafeteria, the student center, study lounges, and campus cafes. I also made notes about my feelings and reactions throughout the process.

Finally, an incorporating documentation was built into the data collection process. "The most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2014, p. 107). Institutional information that is accessible via the institution website and U.S. Department of Education statistics, including enrollment information and graduation rates are presented in order to offer the reader information about the institutional context. I also reviewed artifacts and documents that I found while spending time on each campus. This includes the campus student newspaper, information about academic programs, and advertisements for departmental services. I also took photos of

65

event posters and other campus signage and artwork that was relevant for understanding and describing the campus environment, especially as it relates to multicultural, diversity, and inclusion efforts. This information was helpful in rounding out an understanding and description of the case, but also in comparison with the individual interviews and the campus observation in order to provide a clearer picture of the interview data in context.

**Organization of Data and Analysis**

I used an audio recorder to record the dialogue during each of the fourteen interviews. Once the audio recorded data from interviews was transcribed, I followed the general procedures for analysis of qualitative data, which includes organizing the data, becoming familiar with the data, identifying categories, coding the data, generating themes, interpreting, searching for alternative understandings, and then writing up the findings in a report (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, pp. 273-274). Part of this process, Yin (2014) describes as "playing" with your data including "searching for patterns, insights, or concepts that seem promising" (p. 135). He also identifies several general strategies for managing the data analysis process for case study research and notes that the strategies can be used together. I used two of the suggested strategies, "relying on theoretical propositions" and "working your data from the ground up" (Yin, 2014, p. 136). First, I considered my data in relation to the theoretical framework, critical race theory, as well as the two analytical frameworks in an effort to ensure that these frameworks were the guide to the case study analysis. Also, and consistent with the stated focus and theoretical framework of the research, the participant voices remained the most central part to understanding the racial climates of the three institutional cases and therefore were the central element of the data analysis process.

Then, I used an inductive data analysis process (Yin, 2014) similar to that which is used in grounded theory to guide the challenging task of organizing and coding the data. In grounded theory, open, axial, and selective coding are used to make sense of the data. In open coding, the transcripts and field notes are reviewed and salient categories are identified (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). I spent ample time reviewing the transcribed data in the open coding process. I wanted to make sure I was immersed in the data as much as possible in an effort to raise the most critical perspectives from the student participants. Therefore, my first step in the process was to listen to the recorded interviews while simultaneously reading the transcriptions. During the process, I made notes next to the text about my reactions to the student narratives. Next, as part of the open coding process, I read through the transcripts multiple times and continued to make notes in the margins of the transcriptions. Eventually, my margin notes informed the most salient categories. At this stage, I transferred these salient categories (44 in total) into an excel spreadsheet and also transferred direct text from the transcripts into this spreadsheet, which was organized by participant name and institution.

Next in the process of analysis, the researcher looks for relationships between the categories as part of axial coding (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). Once all of the relevant data was transferred to the excel document and organized by participant (in columns) and category (in rows), I began the axial coding process and worked to identify relationships between the various categories that were identified, and then collapsed related categories together as aligned with the two analytical frameworks. At this point in the data analysis process, the most salient perspectives and themes were beginning to emerge. I made notes on my insights from these themes and also reviewed them with my peer debriefer. As we

talked through what was emerging from as most prominent from the coding process, I was able to further refine my understanding of the data and incorporate unique perspectives from the peer reviewer as a fresh and insightful view as well. At this stage I also incorporated the theoretical and analytical frameworks as a lens for viewing the important themes that were beginning to emerge and allowed the frameworks to further refine my understanding of the data.

From there, I moved into the selective coding stage, which involves "building a 'story' that connects the categories" (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). This was a fun stage where I began to build the story, which included five broad themes that encapsulated the perspectives of the fourteen student participants from three different institutions. While there was nuance among the individual students and between the campuses, the five themes provided the umbrella for the diverse experiences and offered a way to consider both similarities and differences in how participants experienced their traditionally White campus environments.

**Ensuring Validity of Findings**

There are specific methods that are recommended for qualitative and case study research for use in order to validate the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). First, member checking is recommended, which allows participants to review the specific descriptions or final report to ensure that they feel it is an accurate representation of their comments. "It is important for targeted persons to receive drafts of the write-up revealing how they are presented, quoted, and interpreted; the researcher should listen well to these persons' responses for signs of concern" (Stake, 2005, p. 459). I identified two participants from each institution and invited them to review the reported

findings. Each section (theme) of the findings was reviewed by at least two participants as part of the member checking process. The participants were asked to review my interpretation of the data and offer clarification and critique to ensure that their perspective was appropriately represented in the discussion of the findings.

Secondly, Creswell recommends communicating in the report the assumptions or bias that the researcher brings to the study (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). As I designed and conducted this study, I was mindful that as a White researcher exploring the experiences of Black students in college would require the utmost care in ensuring that my bias or privileged perspective would not interfere with representing authentic stories and experiences of the student participants. My field notes served as an opportunity for self-reflexivity and were helpful in thinking through, and articulating, my own learning as a result of the findings of the study.

Creswell also recommends incorporating a peer debriefer who can be asset in ensuring accuracy of the process. The peer debriefer helps to "keep the researcher honest [and] asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). I involved a peer debriefer who was familiar with the topic, the institutional type, and the methodology to help keep me accountable and on track to properly conduct the study and represent the data. I was able to involve this colleague at every stage of the process. This individual identifies racially with the participants of this study, he has experience working at a traditionally White liberal arts college, and he is also experienced with using critical and qualitative methods in his own research. He and I met several times throughout the research design, data collection, and data analysis process. He gave me his perspective on the interview protocol and participant survey, we talked through my

69

reflections after spending time at each campus, and he also asked questions and offered critical insights during the open, axial, and selective coding process.

Finally, triangulation was a fourth method which is recommended and was used as a means for ensuring the accuracy of the findings for this research. Triangulation refers to using multiple sources of data, methods, or theories to inform the findings of the research (Stake, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Yin, 2014). Conducting this research at multiple liberal arts colleges contributed to the quality of this research by providing opportunity to compare findings between institutions that have many similar characteristics. Furthermore, incorporating multiples sources of evidence including individual interviews in addition to observation and analysis of institutional documents and data, added layers to the data analysis opportunity, which resulted in more robust and trustworthy findings.

Ultimately, by using each of the four strategies discussed here, I made efforts to ensure that the experiences of the student participants in this study are honored through this process and I am committed to making sure that the findings of the research are shared with an interest in supporting improvements to the experiences of Black college students at traditionally White liberal arts colleges.

## Case Profiles

For this research, I involved participants from three liberal arts colleges located in the Midwest region of the United States. Each of these three schools identifies as a liberal arts college. In his essay, *How the liberal arts college affects students*, Astin (1999) provides a loose definition of liberal arts colleges as those that are "relatively small, residential, and devoted primarily to providing a liberal arts education for undergraduates" (p. 78). He

goes on to discuss the diversity of liberal arts colleges as well pointing out the variation in affluence and selectivity of these institutions. He also notes that some are religiously affiliated and others are not. While liberal arts programmatic offerings and core curricula vary by institution, a hallmark of a liberal arts education is that a student will engage in interdisciplinary learning across the curricula and that institutions place a high value on faculty teaching. While liberal arts colleges prioritize undergraduate education, a small number do, however, offer post-baccalaureate education as well in field such as "business, education, law, and other professional fields" (Astin, 1999, p. 78).

Each school involved in this research has a similar institutional profile - a small, private, and primarily residential liberal arts college. The mission of each institution references a commitment to a liberal arts education and while two institutions offer graduate level education, the primary focus of the institution is on undergraduate education.

In the section below, I provide brief profiles of three institutions that are featured within this comparison case study. The information shared includes data that is compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) as well as from public information on the institution's website. Additionally, while on-site at each institution, I spent time exploring and observing the campus environment. I collected campus fliers, newspapers, brochures, and took field notes on my observations of the institutional environment. In an effort to protect confidentiality of the student participants at each institution, some of the details about the institution must be shared in general, rather than specific, terms. However, the institution

profiles below are intended to provide a snapshot of the institutional context, which will help set a scene that will come to life further through the stories and experiences of the student participants in the next chapter.

### *Case 1 – North University*

North University is located in a small city of approximately 70,000 people. The community is mostly White (88%) and only two percent of the city population is African American. According to Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data reported by The Education Trust (n.d.), North University enrolls 1,500 students and has an 80% six-year graduation rate. The median ACT composite score for students enrolled at this institution is 29 (The Education Trust, n.d.). According to IPEDS data from fall 2016, underrepresented minority students comprise 12% of the student body and 19% of students are Pell grant recipients (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Black students make up four percent of the student enrollment. According to data from the IPEDS for 2015 compiled by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, two percent of faculty at North University identify as Black, while 83% are White (2017). More than 95% of students live in on-campus housing (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

At North University, I had a chance to interview six students for this research. Five of the students identified as female and one student identified as bi/polygender. Three students were about to finish their sophomore year and three were finishing their junior year. The Student Participant Profile (Table 2) in the section following the institutional profiles offers additional information about the student participants.

North University employs three full-time staff members with dedication to campus work related to multicultural life, diversity, and inclusion. Two staff members provide oversight for the multicultural center on-campus, which provides a range of educational programming opportunities as well as support for underrepresented student groups. The institution also recently hired a chief diversity officer (CDO) who provides campus leadership on student, faculty, administrative, academic, and enrollment matters related to diversity. Under the CDO's leadership, the institution has developed a much stronger web presence and transparency of information regarding campus diversity, including developing an annual report which summarizes campus efforts and challenges as well as developing an annual campus conference focused on diversity. Further, North has two campus-wide committees, which involve students, faculty, and staff to provide recommendations and guidance to campus leaders on diversity and inclusion issues.

In analyzing the documentation available related to diversity, inclusion, respect, and community at North University, it was clear that the institution has an interest in fostering a campus community where students belong and thrive. Admissions materials and campus statements articulate that North aspires to be a community-oriented campus where students of diverse interests and backgrounds feel that they belong. Furthermore, commitments to diversity and inclusion are evident in the institutional mission statement as well as in a separate diversity statement, which was adopted in 2017. The University has developed several statements and initiatives related to diversity and inclusion since 2016, including a new strategic plan, which began in 2017 and names inclusive learning and inclusive living as priorities.

The institution has two gathering spaces, which have been made available to support multicultural programs and underrepresented students. One of the spaces is located in an administrative building, as part of the multicultural center, and is available for all students, but is designed to meet the needs of underrepresented students. The second is a residential community that is led by the campus's Black student organization. Approximately 20 students live in this community. North University has several identity-focused student organizations, including the Black student organization (BSO) that seek to provide a space of belonging for students as well as provide programming designed to raise awareness and celebrate the experience of Black students on campus. The University also has multiple mentoring and empowerment organizations for students of color. Lastly, the institution has recently expanded their Ethnic Studies program and now provides students an opportunity to choose this area as a major or minor program of study.

In my visit to campus, I observed the multicultural life at North University was relatively visible. The two multicultural spaces are centrally located near the campus student center. At the time I visited campus, there was a prominently displayed visual art installation in the student center, which featured student artwork highlighting Black women at the institution. Furthermore, there were many advertisements for campus programs and events on race and identity sponsored by student organizations and campus departments. The campus newspaper that I picked up while at the University included many articles on politics, gender, and race, including one opinion article, which explored a student's experience with the predominantly White institution. My experience in the campus environment gave me a sense that this was a campus where many individuals are engaged in discourse on race, identity, and diversity. The student experiences that were

shared in the interviews confirmed my sense and further revealed the nuanced, and sometimes tense, institutional environment that they experience at North University.

***Case 2 – Green College***

Green College is located in a suburban community of less than 20,000 people, which is located within a very large and ethnically diverse metropolitan area. 2010 Census data reports that 92% of residents of the suburban community were White, while one percent of residents were African American. According to IPEDS data reported by The Education Trust (n.d.), Green College enrolls 1,600 students and has a 73% six-year graduation rate. The median ACT composite score for students enrolled at this institution is 26 (The Education Trust, n.d.). According to IPEDS data from fall 2016, underrepresented minority students comprise 21% of the student body and 37% of students are Pell grant recipients (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Black students make up six percent of the student enrollment. According to data from IPEDS for 2015 compiled by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2017), four percent of faculty at Green College identify as Black, while 80% are White. Nearly 75% of students live in on-campus housing (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Six students at Green College participated in this research. Each of the participants were in their senior year and the interviews were conducted within two months of their graduation from college. Four participants identified as male and two identified as female.

Similar to North University, Green College has staff, programs, services, and organizations dedicated to multicultural life and serving the needs of students of color. Primary differences, however, included the lack of a chief diversity officer and the less prominent and central location of gathering spaces for students of color.

The staff members who provide leadership for campus efforts related to diversity and inclusion are situated within the student affairs function of the institution. Three full-time staff members in the multicultural affairs office provide oversight of programs and services for students of color, first generation college students, the LGBTQ student community, religious groups, and international students. The programming and services provided are focused on student advocacy and education, and the department has worked to develop group support as a means for meeting the vast needs of the student community with limited resources. The multicultural office does not have a gathering space for students, but was recently granted a small house on the perimeter of the campus, which now provides a campus multicultural programming space for students and organizations. Additionally, the Black student organization has had its own large lounge space in the basement of a residence hall for at many years, which is a named space and dedicated to their organization. This lounge is used for organization meetings and events and is a cherished space by members.

Green College makes many assertions about their inclusive campus environment and their commitment to engaging and supporting cultural diversity at the institution through the website, campus statements, and other documents, which were reviewed. The mission statement, which was adopted more than 25 years ago, makes a clear reference to this institutional value. Furthermore, the institution has five guiding values, which provide the core focus of the student experience. Cultural diversity and community are included among the five values, which indicates the stated importance of both to this institution. The Admissions website and publications also speak about how each student contributes within the close-knit and diverse student community. The institutional mission statement

and Admissions materials also affirm that students are known personally within the small, campus community.

Green College was recently able to expand the popular African American Studies program from offering a minor program of study only to now offering a major field of study. The institution also has a campus diversity council and a many ethnic, religious, cultural, and identity based student organizations that provide a lot of campus programming. The advertisements for these organization events are displayed throughout campus and signal that multicultural life at the institution is strong. The student groups work closely with one another and provide a strong network of students interested in cultural life at the College.

While it is apparent that multicultural life at the Green College is engaging a number of students, there seemed to be less investment on the part of the institution in the campus multicultural spaces, staff, and broad institution engagement around diversity when compared with North University.

### Case 3 – Prairie College

Prairie College is located in a city of approximately 250,000 people. 2010 Census data reports that 86% of the city residents are White, while almost four percent of the residents are African American. According to IPEDS data reported by The Education Trust (n.d.), Prairie College enrolls 1,800 undergraduate students and has a 70% six-year graduation rate. The median ACT composite score for students enrolled at this institution is 24. According to IPEDS data from fall 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), underrepresented minority students comprise nine percent of the student body and 26% of students are Pell grant recipients. Black students make up three percent of the student

enrollment. According to data from IPEDS for 2015 compiled by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2017), one percent of faculty at Prairie College are Black, while 96.4% are White. More than 70% of students live in on campus housing (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

I had more difficulty with the recruitment of student participants at Prairie College. Despite several outreaches to students from campus staff as well as attempts on my part with snowball sampling, I was only able to recruit two students to participate. One student was a female and a senior level student who was on-track to graduate two months later. The second student was male and a sophomore within a few weeks of finishing his second year at the college.

Though Prairie College does explicitly call out both diversity and community as core values of the institution, from my experience on campus and in my analysis of institutional documents and information on the website, it was clear that Prairie College has made less investment in multicultural life and diversity when compared with the other two institutions. The institution does not currently have a staff member or office dedicated to multicultural program and services. There are staff members in student affairs, academic support, and the religious life office who provide leadership and advising for initiatives including a campus diversity council, a bias response process, and a student organization focused on celebrating diversity and educating the campus about diversity issues. However, there is not a centralized department leading these efforts and there are no campus gathering spaces dedicated to multicultural life generally, or students of color specifically. The institution does not have an ethnic studies or African American studies

program, but does offer a minor program of study focused on race, identity, and justice within the sociology and anthropology program.

During my two visits to campus, I found the campus newspaper featured a couple of articles on politics and LGBTQ issues. I also noticed some advertisements for campus events that raised awareness on diversity issues, but there appeared to be fewer opportunities on this campus as compared to the other two campuses from my exploration and observation. In general, this institution did not appear to have as many programs or resources dedicated to multicultural life. I found myself wondering how that might be related to the challenges that I had in recruiting students to participate with the research. I was left with several questions. Is it possible that students are not interested in engaging in diversity issues at this institution? Does a lack of institutional investment contribute to less engagement among students? These are questions that are important to consider as part of understanding the experiences of the students who participated with the study and will be further considered among the findings and discussion to come.

### Graduation Rates

Given that this study was developed out of a concern for the unequal retention and graduation outcomes for Black students, a view of the graduation rates of the three colleges that provide the cases for this study is important.  Table 1 displays graduation rate information for the three institutional cases reported by The Education Trust (n.d.). While data for some years is not available, the data available shows the inconsistent graduation rates for Black students at each institution over a five-year period. The enrollment of Black students at each of these three institutions is less than 100 students overall, so the small numbers can lead to significant fluctuation from year to year. However, as the chart shows,

the overall outcomes are lower than other racial groups and demonstrates the need to

better understand the experiences, and needs, of Black students.

Table 1

*Graduation Rates by Ethnicity*

| Green University | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 | 2010 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 73% | 64% | 71% | 68% | 70% |
| **Black students** | **69%** | **30%** | **75%** | **74%** | **43%** |
| Asian students | 60% | 80% | 77% | 75% | 75% |
| Latino students | 71% | 53% | 64% | 59% | 79% |
| White students | 72% | 63% | 69% | 67% | 70% |
| Underrepresented minority | 70% | 49% | 69% | 67% | 66% |
| | | | | | |
| North University | | | | | |
| All students | 80% | 82% | 73% | 77% | 73% |
| **Black students** | **67%** | **NA** | **36%** | **44%** | **25%** |
| Asian students | NA | 82% | NA | 70% | 67% |
| Latino students | NA | 86% | 92% | 50% | 60% |
| White students | 83% | 82% | 76% | 80% | 77% |
| Underrepresented minority | 80% | 78% | 67% | 45% | 44% |
| | | | | | |
| Prairie College | | | | | |
| All students | 70% | 69% | 65% | 64% | 65% |
| **Black students** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **50%** | **50%** |
| Asian students | NA | NA | NA | 50% | 71% |
| Latino students | NA | NA | NA | 40% | 75% |
| White students | 70% | 69% | 66% | 64% | 65% |
| Underrepresented minority | NA | 50% | 73% | 43% | 54% |

Note: NA in cases where the data was not available.


**Participants and Sampling**

At each of the institution sites, I sought to recruit student participants who were in

more advanced stages of their college experience, ideally junior and senior level students.

Students at the later stage of their college career are able to reflect back over a year or

more and consider their experience with the racial climate and have more to offer in terms

of what contributed to their success and persistence towards graduation. With the help of

staff at each of the institutional sites, I employed purposeful sampling, which is often

recommended for qualitative studies that generally involve small samples (Patton, 2002).  I

hoped to involve at least six student participants from each institution. "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Since I was relying on assistance from colleagues who work at the institutions where the research was conducted to help me identify participants, snowball sampling was the more specific type of purposeful sampling I used for this process. Additionally, Patton (2002) discusses maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling, which was another helpful sampling strategy that I intended to use for this study. This sampling style seeks "a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 243). This strategy would be used to encourage the involvement of Black students with a range of intersecting identities (gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, parent educational background, organization/athletic involvement, etc.). Heterogeneity in the intersecting identities of participants provides the opportunity to glean additional insights into how Black students experience the racial climate at traditionally White institutions. Multicultural officers at small colleges are usually well acquainted with many students at the institution and it was my hope that they would be able to help me identify students with diverse intersecting identities and involvements to engage in the study. In the end, however, I found that recruiting participants for this research study was more difficult than expected at two of the three institutions. Therefore, I primarily incorporated purposeful and snowball sampling and did not have the chance to incorporate maximum variation sampling.

At Green College, I was easily able to recruit six participants to engage in the research, but all participants were in their senior year. The six participants at Green College did, however, represent good diversity of background and experience, including gender,

sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.  At North University, the initial email that was sent out to students led to four immediate responses from interested students. A second outreach from the institutional contact led to one more participant expressing interest. However, when I arrived on-site for several days of conducting interviews, I still only had five of the six participants committed. Through snowball sampling, the sixth participant was identified and recommended by another participant. This individual did participate as well, so I was able to reach the goal of six participants from North University; however, there was less diversity of intersecting identities among the group. In particular, most of the participants identified as female. There was good diversity in terms of region of the United States where the students grew up as well as some socioeconomic diversity among participants.

Finally, as discussed above, only two students from Prairie College agreed to participate in the study despite many attempts at outreach from multiple staff contacts at the institution. I visited Prairie College on two separate occasions to conduct interviews with the participants. I was hopeful to engage more student participants through snowball sampling, but the interest simply was not there. I considered removing Prairie College altogether from this study as a result of the low participation. However, I decided that there was important information about the racial climate of Prairie College that could be gleaned from the voices of two student participants and through other case study analysis of the institution.

In the end, there was relatively good gender balance among the participants with seven identifying as female, five identifying as male, one participant identifying as polygender, and one who did not specify their gender. Furthermore, the sample was

diverse in terms of socioeconomic status and about half of the participants were first

generation college students. Three participants self-identified as part of the LGBTQ

community. Nine of the participants identified with a Christian faith denomination and five

students did not identify a religion. Finally, students were involved in a range of academic

majors, campus activities, and leadership positions. Table 2 provides a summary of

demographic information provided in the participant survey (Appendix D) by the fourteen

students who participated in this research.

Table 2

*Student Participant Summary*

| Participant | Institution | Year | Racial Identity | Gender | 1st Gen | Major |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Christopher | Green | Senior | Black | Male | Yes | Business |
| Isabel | Green | Senior | Black, Jamaican | Did not identify | Yes | Sociology & Anthropology |
| Natalie | Green | Senior | African American | Female | No | French, Linguistics |
| Nick | Green | Senior | Black, African American | Male | No | Business |
| Robert | Green | Senior | Black, African American | Male | Yes | African American Studies |
| Dante | Green | Senior | Black, Biracial | Male | No | Politics |
| Betty | North | Junior | Black, Caribbean American | Cisgender Female | Yes | Psychology |
| Bowser | North | Junior | Black, African American | Bi/Polygender | No | Music, Pre-Med |
| Joyce | North | Soph. | Black | Female | Yes | Economics, Ethnic Studies |
| Michelle | North | Soph. | Black, African American | Female | No | Ethnic Studies |
| Stephanie | North | Soph. | Black | Female | No | Theater, Anthropology |
| Victoria | North | Junior | Black | Female | Yes | Mathematics Education |
| Cee | Prairie | Soph. | Black, African American | Male | No | Communication |
| Felicia | Prairie | Senior | African American | Female | No | Criminal Justice |

# IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will report the findings of the research, which focuses heavily on the responses to the interview protocol by the fourteen students who participated in this research and shared stories of their experiences at their respective colleges. Among the findings of student stories, I will share additional information collected through document analysis and observation from my visits to each campus.

In many ways, the findings of this research echo prior research in regards to the challenges that Black students face on traditionally White college or university campuses. This includes Black student perceptions that there are few spaces and opportunities to see their identity or heritage represented within the campus environment or the curriculum (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jay, 2003) as well as the negative stereotypes that frequently impact their interactions with peers (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, this research confirms prior literature regarding the importance of cultural centers and Black student organizations for fostering a sense of affirmation, belonging, and re-energizing students so they can press forward toward the goal of college graduation (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2006).

Much of the literature that was foundational in developing this research project is from the 1990s and 2000s. Yet, the context of higher education has changed significantly in the last ten years, and arguably the last three years have been among the most tenuous when considering the campus racial climate at colleges and universities across the country. Widely publicized events such as the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, the campus protests that followed at the University of Missouri and many other places, as well as the recent election of Donald Trump as President of United States in 2016,

and his actions in the early months of his presidency, shape the context of this research project in significant ways as well. The interview data was collected just two to three months after Trump took office in January 2017.  Student perceptions of the campus climate were undoubtedly impacted by campus tension, concerns, and their personal experiences in the wake of the election as well as the result of the previous few years of tension and concerns around race and justice issues that have been a heavy component of the national news cycle and our societal discourse. This current context makes this research even more relevant. Students on college campuses are feeling tension and college and university administrators and faculty are grappling with how to best help their students stay positively engaged in community and conversation in this context. Higher education leaders are mindful that the current social, cultural, and political tensions are not likely dissipate any time soon. Therefore, this research provides the opportunity to illuminate the voices and experiences of Black students in this current context and provide some recommendations for institutional leaders interested in fostering improved campus environments, and outcomes, for Black students on their campuses.

**Overview of Themes**

With the prior research and current context in mind as well as the theoretical and analytical frameworks as the lenses from which to view the data including the participant stories, document analysis, and the campus environment, five prominent themes emerged. These themes capture the challenges of Black students within the traditionally White liberal college environment, the importance of having people to trust and spaces of authenticity, the nuance of a small college environment, and the personal resilience that comes from developing a strong identity. In brief, this study reveals that:

1) Black students spend a lot of time **negotiating and interpreting their interactions with White peers**.

2) It is important for Black students to find **people whom they can trust and spaces where they can be authentic** within the TWI environment.

3) There are **facades of progress** within traditionally White liberal arts college environments that at times blind, confuse, and frustrate Black students.

4) The small college environment offers a **magnifying effect** to racial climate experiences for Black students.

5) Success for Black students within the TWI is enhanced by a **strong Black identity, confidence, and empowerment**.

These five themes, and associated subthemes, will be explored in depth in the sections to follow.

**Negotiating Interactions with White Peers**

While certainly the diversity among the fourteen participants in this study leads to differing experiences within the traditionally White colleges that they are attending, a strong finding from the research is that Black students spend considerable time thinking about, interpreting, and negotiating their interactions and relationships with White peers. This may also be true of their interactions with other students of color or international students, but it seems to be especially pronounced with fellow students who are White. Museus (2014), in his meta-analysis of campus climate research, notes that students of color regularly experience unwelcoming campus environments at predominantly White institutions and that they experience difficulty in negotiating their culture within the institutional culture. This finding is true among the participants in this study.

Nearly every participant could identify times when they were made to feel uncomfortable by their interactions with their White peers, and even by some of their closest friends at their college. The impact of these experiences varies, of course, based on the background, confidence, and patience of each individual student, but the pervasiveness of their persistent, challenging experiences is aligned with the concept of racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004) that is often described as part of a Black student's experience navigating predominantly White institution environments. McGee and Stovall (2015) discuss the "racial assaults" that Black college students face, "which lead to mental fatigue and psychological distress" (p. 502-503). The negotiation of interactions with White peers included stories of interpreting perceptions and experiencing negative stereotypes, microaggressions, and other racist actions. The students also described their frustration at the lack of interest by peers in the Black experience as well as they ignorance that they often encounter when interacting with White peers. Finally, they described peers who are seeking to be allies, only sometimes successfully, and many participants showed patience as they defended the actions and comments of their White peers and friends.

**Interpreting Peer Perceptions**

In their research on the racial climate of a liberal arts college, McClelland and Auster (1990) found that although on the surface the small college environment seemed generally friendly, there was actually more tension and resistance among White students in actually developing close friendships with Black students. In my study, this tension was also present in the stories of students. Students described their caution and mistrust of interactions with some White peers. Robert, a senior student at Green College, spent the first couple of years of college keeping a very low profile. Robert is originally from a big city

and grew up attending a school and living in a neighborhood where everyone shared his racial background. In his early days of college, he stayed among very close friends from the athletic team where he was a manager and stayed in his room much more than engaging in the social scene at the College. He is a relatively quiet guy, but describes his attempts to be friendly to other students,

> One thing that I really don't like is like I can be right here walking and I can see a White person and I'll look at them and I'll smile and they don't smile back and I'm just like why are you not smiling back? Are you not smiling back because you don't know me? Are you not smiling back because me smiling at you is uncomfortable for you? Are you not smiling because I'm Black? I don't know so it's like sometimes I think like it doesn't take anything to just smile back. I'm trying to be nice.

In a small environment, this expectation of friendliness and community interaction is a hallmark of the experience. Having experiences where other students do not respond or interact, even to small attempts like Robert described has an impact. It seemed incongruent with the community expectations leading Robert to question the reason for such response, consistent with the psychological dimension of the Hurtado et al. (1998) framework, which discusses how perceptions of racial discrimination and conflict can negatively impact an individual's view of the racial climate on their campus. Christopher shared a similar concern as his fellow Green College student, Robert. Christopher is a very visible leader at the institution and has a great deal of campus influence and many connections. Yet, he still questions the authenticity of his interactions with friends and peers at the College,

> ...and that's the scary part. You may smile in my face and call me your friend, or best friend but, what do you really think about me being a different culture or a different race? So that kind of, in my head, reflects what the College is racially, like I don't know because sometimes I can feel very...like there are of course a couple of people that I know for sure care about my race and care about my thoughts and culture. But then there's a huge majority where it could be iffy, I just don't know. Like, are you one of those people that if you had the opportunity to say what you really wanted to say, that I would be shocked?

88

Interpreting who can be trusted was a theme among many of the participants and is reflected in further comments in the sections below. Both Robert and Christopher describe their lack of trust with the intentions of their peers wondering if they are truly accepted in the campus environment or if they are actually not supported or valued by their peers. However, trust issues for some students, went beyond the just being valued and became more a matter of personal safety. Victoria, a junior at North University, described her initially feeling of comfort when she first arrived at the institution, but over time she grew more cautious with the campus environment. She said, "Definitely into my sophomore year it's like, I don't know who to trust or what to believe. Oh, and now, I'm still on the fence of who can I trust, I make sure to lock my door every night just because you never know." The small college environments are often to be considered safe havens of trust and community, but students shared that they were often concerned about peer perceptions as well as their actual safety of their campus environments.

**Negative Stereotypes**

For many of the students, the negotiation of their interactions also involve dealing with actual and perceived stereotypes from their peers, which is an additional psychological burden that they must carry with them while studying at a TWI. Isabel was a senior at Green College and at the time of her interview, she was participating in an internship and living off-campus. She was thoroughly enjoying her time away from the campus environment. She reflected in the interview on how exhausted she had grown from four years in what she described as the college "bubble". Much of her exhaustion seemed to also be connected to this constant negotiation of interactions and the challenges that she felt of having to be hyper self-aware.

I felt like I've always had to be on a heightened sense of awareness of how I'm acting, speaking, or look because I'm Black. Whether or not people are consciously thinking anything about me, there's always that subconscious stream of thought about Black people and what that means for a person to be Black, and what that means about them. So, I feel like I've always been on a heightened awareness of how I portray myself because of that.

While Cee, a sophomore at Prairie College, did not seem terribly bothered by negative stereotypes that others at the institution had about him, he had given some consideration to how he was perceived by the campus community, especially when he first arrived as a first year student. He was an athlete who came to the College from a coastal state and described a pretty major culture shock to the institutional environment and the students he met from the Midwest. "Some definitely perceived me – at least when I first got to campus – as a too cool for school kind of guy, mostly because I did walk around with a hood on and I did have music in my ears because I didn't know anybody." Cee believes that his interactions with students over the years changed their perception of him and he's now seen as a very friendly, outgoing student, but the initial impression others had of his is that he was uninterested in the community and school. Stephanie, a sophomore from North University, found some similar ways to keep to herself when she was not interested in engaging with other students in the community and recognizes that this led to some negative stereotypes.

I know I'm perceived as very stand-offish and mean, but that's generally because I put music in and don't really want to engage with everyone and I'm just trying to get to class or to my room or wherever it is I'm going….and then I'm probably perceived as ghetto or less intelligent you know, than White counter parts, just because that's just how some people see Black women on campus.  So, I mean I don't really pay attention to it, like I got in, you got in, so obviously we're all in the same basic level of intelligence.  So, probably that way but not to an extent that I would care.

She identifies in her comments some of the negative stereotypes that she perceives her peers may have about her. The negative stereotypes that she identifies certainly impacts her view of the campus racial climate when considering the psychological dimension (Hurtado et al., 1998), however literature on stereotype threat would suggest that Stephanie may also buy-in to these same stereotypes (Steele, 2002), which could negatively impact her performance at the institution. However, Stephanie and another North student, Betty, state that they choose not to let possible negative stereotypes get in the way of what they are trying to accomplish in college. Betty said, "a lot of people tell me that I have an accent and stuff like that and that's as far as I've gotten…. because of stereotypes and stuff like that…. I don't really rock with those." Betty was clear that she keeps a very small group of people around her. She is unwilling to interact with people who are going to engage her with ignorance, so while she is aware that her peers may have certain beliefs about her that are rooted in stereotypes, she refuses to spend much energy worrying about this and she works to keep her distance from those people.

**Microaggressions and Overt Racism**

While the participants in the study were mindful of the perceived negative stereotypes that their peers may be holding, they also had many experiences of encountering microaggressions and more overt forms of racism, which they are forced to deal with as they pursue their college experience. Unfortunately, the students in this study spoke about these regular encounters, which have occurred at all stages of their college experience and occur both within and outside of the classroom by peers, friends, faculty, and community members. Ultimately, their perception of their campus environment and their sense of belonging in the community may be impacted by these experiences. The

interactions with peers, which have a significant impact on feelings of "fit" within in the college community, are described here.

In her first week of college, Felicia, who was a senior at Prairie College, was gathering among her residence hall floormates for a meeting led by the resident assistant (RA). The students were discussing the reasons that they chose to attend this college and Felicia shared the following interaction,

> the RA said, "well, the only reason you got into this school is because you're Black" and I just kind of looked at her and everyone else looked at me…. And, I didn't know what to do because I was just a freshman and people had said things before that upset me, but people had never been so blatantly disrespectful in a room full of so many people.

Felicia's shock from the comment by her RA prevented her from speaking up in the moment, but given that this experience occurred in the first few days of the semester, it was one of the memories that stood out in regards to her transition to college. Felicia's parents were both alumni from Prairie College as well, so she was considered a legacy at the institution. She had grown up in a diverse community and high school within a large metropolitan area. She had family from the area of Prairie College, so she was somewhat aware that she was entering an environment that was less culturally diverse, but nevertheless, she was highly surprised that she had fellow students that shared this belief.

Isabel from Green College, and Michelle, a sophomore at North University, both described being made to feel exotic by their peers. For Isabel, her teammates and friends frequently made her feel uncomfortable at campus parties. She described the frustrating experiences that she had in social situations with her teammates at the school,

> I felt like they had good intentions, because yes, I'm a good dancer, but it's just like, I'm not a monkey or a clown to entertain you, because you know what I mean? It

just felt like they had good intentions, and they genuinely wanted me to dance, there was no question about that, but it's just like why is it every time that we're partying, I have to be the person to entertain you with my dance moves? Why is that my responsibility?

For Michelle, the inexperience of her White peers with Black people frequently led to uncomfortable encounters, and frustration, for her. She describes her interpretation of what her peers believed to be compliments.

> It's weird because people generally like me, but I feel like they see me as an art exhibit. What I mean by that is when I get my hair done. Oh you're so beautiful. You're this. Oh I love your Snapchat. You're so funny. I'm like, are you being genuine about that? Sometimes I feel like some students come here and see their first Black person, which is fine, but it's like, know your distance.

Some of the participants talked about peer actions that they found to be racist or forms of cultural appropriation, and their attempts to provide some education. Of course, this attempt at education requires patience and is only sometimes received well by their peers. Joyce described her experience,

> Actually another student who was from Africa, and I, had a conversation with a young [White] lady who was wearing a dashiki and has her hair locked just to see if she knew the background about what she was wearing, and she didn't. So we tried to explain to her that she was appropriating other people's culture that she didn't know anything about, which is seen as disrespectful. And she was basically like, 'okay I'll take that into consideration' and we still see her with the dashiki. So there's a lot of things with cultural appropriation on this campus and it's just unfortunate.

Similarly, Nick, who plays football at Green College, chose to confront some of his fellow teammates who held a theme party in their residence hall room and attempted to use what they believed to be a clever play on words, which Black students found disrespectful of the Black Lives Matter movement. His attempt to educate them about their actions led to a productive conversation and eventually an apology from the teammates to the Black student organization.

While many of the situations the students describe as frustrating or disrespectful, other incidents described move beyond benign and created genuinely frightening and hostile environments for the students. These situations are enhanced by the fact that these are very small and residential campus environments where students not only study, but also live. Several students at North University described fake event posters, which were posted around campus with the intent of making Black students, and other students of color, uncomfortable within the campus environment. Joyce described the campus environment after the election, "these past few months, I'll say since the last election, people have been very bold with things that have been posted on campus. There have been KKK pamphlets going around and recently, there were posters around campus about an event focused on 'Black Fragility'. It was completely made up."

Victoria also described the trolling behavior that was frequently used on social media, particularly with Yik Yak, a platform that allows for anonymous postings within a close radius of the campus. This was amplified after Black students on her campus became very vocal with administration and faculty about their concerns about the campus racial climate and lack of support for students of color.

> White students on campus were posting on social media sites like Facebook and Yik Yak just totally disrespecting, disregarding all students of color on campus and targeting Black students. And at that point, I definitely wanted to drop out just because it wasn't safe to go anywhere. Not on campus, not off campus, I know a few, myself and maybe ten other people actually stayed in the multicultural center when it was downstairs and like slept there and ate there and like did everything there if we didn't have classes because it was so hectic to go outside.

Several of the students interviewed as part of the study shared experiences where they felt disrespected by their White peers either because of their change in language or

their use of the N-word. Isabel and Cee both talked about how their peers, at times, change

how they speak when around them. Isabel, expressing annoyance, said,

> It's like they use slang that they just wouldn't always use, just because it's me, and
> it's just like "yo, what's up, what's happening?" Some crap like that, and I'm just "hi,
> how are you?" Why couldn't you just greet me? Why did you have to do the extra,
> you know what I mean?

Cee described very similar experiences,

> Sometimes you hear people who change the way they talk or they try to use words,
> not necessarily negative words, but slang words or ebonic words. I definitely don't
> take offense to it, but I will speak up and say don't try to be something you're not
> because you'll never be able to. You'll never know where I'm from. You'll never be
> able to experience where I'm from and even if you do, you'll probably still not get
> the full aspect because I'm African American and you're not. So, be yourself no
> matter who you come into contact with."

A number of students also discussed their experience of White friends or peers using the N-

word around them. Some of the common experiences were associated with music and

parties, but the participants explained that there was a lot of ignorance associated with the

use of the word and they frequently need to correct their peers. As Nick explained,

> I've faced a lot of ignorance and not hatred towards Black people. When people
> understand they're not supposed to say the N-word, but not why they're not
> supposed to say the N-word, it doesn't help them not say the N-word. So, a lot of
> kids on the football team and around campus still feel comfortable saying the N-
> word, especially if one person gives them permission to, then they think that it's
> something they can do all the time. It's just ignorance that I've run into. You got to
> know better if you're going to be on a liberal arts campus.... in a liberal arts school,
> kids are sensitive to that kind of thing.

Many of the participants recognized their social power in the campus environment and

expressed that their White peers were generally not likely to be intentionally or overtly

racist. It was more likely to be the result of ignorance, or covert. Christopher explained,

> Nobody's going to walk up to me and call me the N-word in the cafeteria. That's
> social suicide. But, you do hear it and sometimes people find a way to be incognito

or casually say what they really want to say. And, Yik Yak allows people to say what they really want to say, that Blacks are considered second-class citizens.

Regardless of the intentionality of the comments or actions, or if there was a name and a face associated with comments on posters or social media, the student participants were regularly experiencing racist interactions from peers that caused mistrust and division. These examples provide a look at how the campus racial climate becomes hostile for Black students with both the psychological and behavioral dimensions in mind.

**Lack of Campus Interest in the Black Experience**

As described above and consistent with the prior literature on the college racial climate, students at these predominantly White institutions frequently encounter disrespectful and racist experiences with peers. Additionally, though, a number of the participants in this study noted the way in which a lack of interest in their culture, their racial experiences, or no desire to understand and learn, by White peers, impacted their feelings about the racial climate and their sense of belonging within the campus environment. They described the demoralizing effect of this lack of interest from their White peers.

At Prairie College, there are a small number of students of color and few opportunities for students to connect around their racial identity or a collective experience of being a student of color on-campus. The only ethnic diversity club on-campus has, at times, worked to raise awareness among the campus community regarding the experiences of students of color. One project they attempted modeled Harvard's "I, too, am Harvard" awareness raising campaign about microaggressions. Unfortunately, though, the lack of

campus interest was disappointing and depressing for some students, including Felicia. She

said,

> It was like, we are trying to bring awareness about something to people who don't
> really care, or don't really care to learn about this issue. So, my time could be better
> spent elsewhere because I do have other things to do. So, I just stopped going. And,
> it was like one of those clubs that just kind of stopped meeting. People stopped
> going because it just gets discouraging when you are trying and nothing is working.

Nick, when describing the campus racial climate, discusses a similar lack of broad campus

interest in the activities of the Black student organization at Green College as well,

> I think anytime there is a chance for involvement about anything that has to do with
> race, so like if there's a panel, the African American Studies classes, or most of the
> [Black student organization] events, if you look at who's there, that's a
> representation of what the climate is. Only Black people are interested in Black
> people at the College.

Both Felicia and Nick describe the recognition that while there are some campus

opportunities for learning and understanding the experiences of Black people and Black

culture at their institutions, the engagement of individuals outside of that direct experience

is extremely limited. The behavioral dimension of the campus racial climate framework

(Hurtado et al., 1998) suggests that the frequency and quality of engagement across racial

difference is a significant factor that contributes to the racial climate. A lack of engagement

of students of other cultural backgrounds with these activities limits these opportunities

for cross-cultural learning and dialogue. Furthermore, it communicates to Black students

that their experience is not valued by members of the campus community, which negatively

influences their sense of belonging on-campus.

The challenge for many of the students in the study is that their peers, White peers

in particular, don't seem to really understand their experience. And, as the stories of Felicia

and Nick shared seems to confirm, they are not spending time trying to further understand

through curricular or co-curricular opportunities. At North University, Bowser, a junior

student, acknowledges that the lack of engagement across culture, and the increased

campus tensions around race, has developed into a significant divide within their campus

community. "The people in the POC community don't feel comfortable with White people

and sometimes White people just don't understand what the POC people are going

through." Joyce, who is a fellow North student shares Bowser's perspective and expressed

her wish that members of the University community would work to truly hear and

understand the concerns and experience of Black students.

> I think people understanding where me and other students of color are coming from
> instead of just thinking of us as wanting to stir things up. Like I think just people
> giving us the chance and just listening to us like actually being like, 'hey, let me
> actually hear and see why they're hurting and why they're upset'… I think that
> would be really nice. Just open communication and understanding would be really,
> really nice. And, not only with the students but with the faculty and administration
> as well.

This desire by the student participants to be understood, seen, and heard seemed to be

even more salient when thinking about the context of unrest nationwide over the past

several years. Isabel at Green College described the frustration and disrespect she felt

during and after one of the campus demonstrations organized by members of the Black

student organization in late in 2014.

> I think I felt disrespected when Yik Yak was a thing, and we had the sit-in at the
> student center… I'm making assumptions that they were White students… it was
> basically they didn't get it, so it was just like "why the fuck are they sitting in? I'm
> just trying to get to class. I don't care." It was like, that type of talk, and I just felt like
> that was really disrespectful. There were people that literally walked through the
> sit-in, and just didn't care. They were almost pissed off, like we were
> inconveniencing them…. It's just, anytime I felt disrespected, it's been mostly by the
> ignorance of students about certain issues and they just didn't understand what
> they were doing wrong.

This regular experience of encountering White peers who were uninterested, didn't care, or were just ignorant to the experience of Black people in the United States and Black students on-campus, was a frequently described frustration among students in the study. Without a doubt, the compounding experiences over the course of several years at the institution wears on the students. The frustration related to peer ignorance, as described by Isabel, may be enhanced, though, as a result of the lack of engagement with campus learning opportunities described previously by both Felicia and Nick. White students have the opportunity to expand their understanding through classes and campus programs, but many do not. Therefore, Black students are often left feeling unimportant and disrespected in the institutional environment.

**Defending White Peers and Maintaining Connections**

Despite the frustrations that some of the participants described with the lack of awareness by their White peers, they also demonstrated a high level of patience with their fellow students. Many of the participants defended the ignorance of White friends and peers in the college community and were willing to maintain connections despite the challenges that come up in their interactions. According to Dante,

> One of the guys I'm closest with in my fraternity is insanely Republican. He is from Texas, and he's White and he has blue eyes and blond hair. I feel like there are times when I bite my tongue because I don't want to hurt his feelings, because I would tell him how stupid some of the stuff he says is. We have good discussions.

The patience that Dante expresses is shared in Cee's stories of encounters with his friends at Prairie College. His experience demonstrates his willingness to call out, but also teach, his White friends regarding their language use, especially as it relates to use of the N-word.

I'll like give them a look that says, that's not cool man. And, they'll say, "oh I'm sorry man". And, I'm like, "I get it. I know where you're from, so I can't be mad," but at the same time it's one of those things where I'm like "hey, please respect that I'm in the room. Whatever you do when I'm not in the room, that's your business. But, when I am in the room, try not to use it." But, I get it, people slip all the time… And then sometimes people will catch themselves and they'd stop, or change the sentence, or they'd just end it and I'm just like you're learning, you're learning.

Christopher at Green College has also taken the approach of being patient with ignorance and keeping an open position to answering questions from peers, but also from staff and faculty.

So, it's in the approach that we can determine if it's genuine or if we're being mocked, or if we're being targeted. And if it's a genuine question, like, I want to do better, then I think that the whole population, majority of the population of minority students receive it well and want to contribute to making academia be better.

While Christopher, and the other Black students, who are willing to be patient with White students, faculty, and staff at the TWI are kind to be open to doing this work, the burden of this certainly has the potential to interrupt and interfere with their primary purpose of completing their bachelor's degree. Yet, many Black students likely recognize that to fully engage within the campus community at a traditionally White liberal arts college, this level of patience, understanding, and endurance will likely be required.

## Trust, Authenticity, and Counterspaces

This study incorporates Strayhorn's (2012) model of college students' sense of belonging as an analytical framework. The model suggests that a sense of belonging is a basic human need and necessary to motivate of action and achieve positive outcomes in college (p.18). Further, Strayhorn describes a sense of belonging as mattering, feeling valued, and ultimately fitting in within the college environment. The section above, which focused on the Black student's negotiation of interactions with White peers certainly

suggests that in TWI environments, Black students frequently encounter challenges that cause them to, at times, question themselves, who they can trust, as well as their safety within the institutional environment. This second theme further explores the participant stories of feeling out of place, but also their experience finding spaces for building trusting relationships and communities of belonging within the TWI environment.

**Feeling Out of Place**

When considering spaces where they felt out of place while in College, there were an array of responses, which demonstrated that most students were struggling to find the campus a fully welcoming community. Strayhorn's (2012) model suggests that in order to foster achievement, sense of belonging must be fostered in all aspects of college life, including the classroom, residence halls, and student organizations, for example. Yet, the participants of this study identified a number of different spaces and places where they did not feel that they fit in.

Some students talked about the uncomfortable feeling of being the only student of color or Black person, in the class. Cee shared that as he completed his second full year of at Prairie College, he had not yet take a college class with another Black student.

> There have definitely been times where I've felt out of place in the classroom based on topics that have brewed. I feel like I can't say anything or I don't want to say anything because I don't want to step on anyone's toes or cause any problems. This is when topics related to race, gender, political views, or controversial topics in society come up.

Michelle talked about the insecurity that she feels when she is the only Black student in her classes. She articulated that she feels as though she does not belong at the university in these moments.

101

My general education class last year spring term was all White, a few Asians, and then one Black person, which is me and there were a lot of upperclassmen so I really felt like I didn't belong there even though it was a one hundred level class. I didn't feel like I belonged because I didn't have anyone that looked like me in there. I feel like if there's another Black student in the class, that's validation that I need to be here or I should be here or that I belong here. When I didn't see that, it kind of made me feel insecure. I participated, but I tried to keep my interest to a minimum. I was very, very closed off.

Betty also had a similar experience of feeling out of place in the classroom, but also described the discomfort she feels when she has to encounter other campus spaces where she is likely the only person of her identity represented. Her stress about encountering these spaces, which seems to have grown over the years while in college, leads her to avoid certain university opportunities, at times.

...when I just walk into a space or an environment where I am unfamiliar with the possibilities that could happen. I feel very uncomfortable. But that's just a personal thing, I don't like feeling uncomfortable, I like to know what I'm getting myself into. So, if it's uncertain, or if it's too risky, then I don't put myself in those situations.

Betty is likely not accessing all the college experiences that are available to her due to her fear of how she will feel, as a Black woman, in various campus spaces. The mental toll and cumulative impact to Black students as a result of challenging experiences and navigating the TWI environments is significant.

Many of the participants in this study were actively involved student leaders on their campuses. In general, they were a motivated group and many held prominent roles within their campus communities. Some students, however, described uncomfortable moments, related to their racial identity, that they encountered while serving in leadership capacity. Dante, who was a successful student athlete described his experience with attending certain athletic events or spending time with players of certain athletic teams at

102

the institution, "there's time when I feel uneasy as a Black guy and as a gay guy. It's two compounding factors. I put my chest out, drop my voice an octave." Even as an individual with social influence at the College, Dante's intersecting identities forced him to be mindful of his place and his safety. Also within the Green College community, Christopher had a number of leadership opportunities during his college years. A pinnacle opportunity involved the chance to give a speech to the institution's Board of Trustees.

> I was at a Board of Trustees meeting one trustee and I were the only ones in the room who were Black and I had to stand up and talk. My original message was going to be in regards to race relations on campus and I was so uncomfortable with it, uncomfortable at presenting this as a Black man to a board of White, old people. So, in the moment, I tabled it completely and talked about the campus formal and how great of a success that was and how the College should continue to advance that as an opportunity for students…. I got really uncomfortable and really intimidated and I was ready to leave as soon as we were done.

This was an interesting moment for Christopher. He is an extremely confident person and this opportunity with the Board was a unique chance for him to share his experience and impress upon the Board some of the challenges with race relations at the institution. However, the power dynamics of that space with wealthy, White trustees instantly forced a change in behavior for this student, and served as a reminder of the legacy of White norms, values, and dominant presence within academia.

The students in the study discussed places where they felt at ease, often within Black student organization spaces, but sometimes among academic spaces, athletic groups, and Greek organizations, but their stories demonstrate that it is difficult to navigate the TWI environment without at times feeling out of place. Isabel, who was within a couple of months of graduation stated,

> Being in the [local] community I feel out of place sometimes. I feel like there's certain classrooms where I felt out of place. I think the most distinct in my mind is

basketball, and honestly, just in general. I feel it's very nice not being in the College bubble.

She was on her way to graduation from college, but as she reflected back, there were numerous times where she felt uncomfortable with the campus. She was very clear in the interview that she was ready to be done with college and return to a more comfortable and diverse living environment.

**Experiences with Faculty and Staff**

In the previous review of literature on sense of belonging and persistence in college, researchers show the power that faculty can have to foster a sense of inclusion within the campus environment when they experience racial hostility or discrimination at the institution. Certainly, the findings from this research supports that Black students' experiences with their faculty can be highly influential (positively and negatively) for their experience, and with their success, in College.

**Some challenges with faculty.** In addition to feeling out of place in certain spaces at the institution, some participants identified difficulty with their interactions with faculty and staff. In general, this included feeling that some faculty and staff were not truly invested in their success. Students at North University were the most critical of their interactions with faculty pointing to incidents where they felt less support than they expected. Joyce noted her attempts to seek help from a faculty member in the natural sciences, which was her original intended area of study. She described seeking study tips for an exam after hearing from peers that the professor was very helpful. As it turns out, he offered little guidance to her. She perceived his lack of assistance as an indication that he did not support her, possibly because of her identity as a Black woman. Victoria also

104

encountered difficulty with faculty and staff at her institution. She was the only participant in the study who did not identify at least one faculty or staff member that she felt that she could trust. Further, as a mathematics major, she was highly dissatisfied with her experiences with the faculty in that department stating,

> Classes have been terrible. I'm predominately in the math department and I have to take a [math] class every term to be on schedule with the major. I really don't like the math professors because they're all old, White men. They have a different view on life.

While Victoria did not elaborate further on reason for her mistrust of the mathematics faculty, she was adamant about her poor experience, mistrust, and her feelings on this issue seemed to be a cloud over her college experience.

Students were more likely to point out the challenges that they had with faculty in STEM fields. At Green College, Nick discussed differences in his experience between two majors,

> When I was a biology major, my academics seemed more isolated, like I was on my own. It felt more like high school like teachers were kind of there just to teach, they weren't really there for other kinds of support, and I didn't feel as comfortable with them. And then when I became an education major, it was the opposite, where the teachers seemed like they cared about how I were doing outside of the classroom and I feel more comfortable with them. I felt like I was learning better with those teachers.

At Prairie College, both Felicia and Cee spoke about the ways that their White faculty seemed to be learning how to better interact and support Black students. Felicia described her first year at the institution and they interactions she had with her faculty,

> When they are talking about a sensitive topic, they're worried they are going to hurt your feelings or say something wrong or make you feel that you don't want to be here, since retention was so bad anyway, I think there's a little bit of teachers not knowing what's okay and what's not, so they ask your opinion as if your opinion is going to speak for the whole group. I don't think they do it out of place of we want

you to be the representative, but I think they do it because they want to hear what you have to say.

She went on to talk about how she saw growth with some of her faculty over the years, especially faculty in her major who she's had class with several times.

> Now it's not so bad. Now teachers just talk and teach around me freely like I'm a normal person, which has always been the case. Yeah, I mean, it's interesting. I think it's been an interesting journey watching teachers evolve and be comfortable in what they can say around me.

Similarly, Cee, as a sophomore, recognizes the need for faculty at his TWI to make improvements in teaching and advising Black students. He said, "They know that the more success that they have with us, the more success they'll have in the future with other African American students, male or female."

While most of the challenging experiences shared were related to working with White faculty, Michelle expressed some disappointment with her interactions with faculty or color at her institution.

> I just feel like I am entitled to them acknowledging me. If we see each other walking and I want to go for a wave, and I don't see them waving back or even speak to me, I get upset. It's other faculty and staff of color that will walk past and not speak or anything. If something goes down [on-campus], they'll say 'I'm here for you' and stuff like that. But, I'm just like, 'are you really here for me?' because even in walking you don't want to speak to me. That hurts my feelings.

Michelle's feelings impress the heavy responsibility that is placed on faculty, particularly faculty of color, in supporting students of color, especially in the current times of campus racial tensions and unrest. It is clear that the students are looking for support from their faculty at liberal arts colleges, especially faculty of color, whom they assume to share their experience and expect to be even more available as a resource. These expectations likely

add pressure to the work of faculty of color during a time when they may also be experiencing difficulty with the campus racial environment.

**Good experiences.** The vast majority of the student stories that were shared about interactions with the faculty and staff at these three small liberal arts colleges was positive. Nearly all participants were able to identify one or more faculty or staff member that they felt that they could trust and rely on at their institution. However, students made strong points about how faculty support was powerful in their success in college.

Betty talked about this from holistic perspective noting both the teaching and advising responsibilities, and expectations, of small college faculty.

> I think they play a big role, hence the reason why I want to be an educator. I definitely think they have a big role in ensuring safe, and brave, places for everyone in the classroom. If that is not established at the start of the class, whether it's in the beginning of the term or anywhere in the term where it may have to come up, I feel like that's dangerous for people who are a racial minority, or any minority. With that, I have a few professors who like have taken me on as their child, sadly.  They like look out for me in every aspect in terms of like academics, social life, mental health, all those things.

When talking about one of the staff members he can rely on most at the institution, Nick says,

> [D] pretty much adopts the kids that work for him. So, he becomes almost like a father figure that can be your friend because he'll look out for you. He'll make sure you're in shape and he's going to make sure you're doing what you're doing, but also take care of you. So, if you need anything he'll do what he can for you.

Natalie, a senior from Green College, also notes the personalized supports as well as the high expectations that her faculty have shown,

> I've had positive interactions with my advisors; they've been incredible throughout my four years. They're very personable, and they were interested in getting to know me as a person, and I was interested in getting to know them, and they have set high standards for me and helped me a lot.

The personalized support is a hallmark of the small college experience. The institutions in this study have low faculty to student ratios and they are highly focused on undergraduate student teaching, so these findings are expected.

**Support of Black faculty and staff.** I was struck by how many specific comments focused on the spaces of trust, and support, that were sought by student participants from Black faculty and staff, as Nick and Natalie described above. Similarly, in her discussion of campus support, Isabel said,

> I've had a very positive experience with [Dr. D], and I will say that it's because she's a Black female that has contributed to a lot of that relationship, but she has been a very positive role model in my life. I see her as more of an aunt than anything else.

Several other Green College students expressed the importance of this same professor in their experience. Robert said,

> I feel like I can trust her because she always keeps it real with me.  She's always giving me advice on things and suggestions and just relating to me because she is from [my city]. She lives there now still, so it's like that relation that we have makes me trust her because I know that she cares. I know she wants to see me succeed.

Students frequently used the words trust and comfort in their conversations about the importance of Black faculty and staff in their experience. Nick described his interactions this way,

> I guess I could say I feel like the Black faculty and staff on-campus just care about me more, because I'm a Black student and I get that feeling from them in the eye contact that we make. I think they realize where they are and the position that they're in, so they kind of know to be there for Black students. I feel more comfortable with them and I think that's what kind of makes me feel like I can go to them.

Further, some participants discussed multiple faculty or staff that they feel comfortable with, but that they could be more honest about what was happening in their lives with Black faculty. Cee shared,

> [Mr. M], since he's really big on diversity, he kind of goes out of his way to talk to different people on-campus who would struggle like my experience, those who come from different communities, like African American, he goes out of his way to connect. I've gone to him with some more personal things than with my coaches.

Similarly, Stephanie talks about two great advisors, but some differences in how she finds support with them,

> My first advisor is my theater department advisor and so, I'm really close with her…. My second advisor is my anthropology advisor and she is a Black woman, so I can even have a more in-depth conversation about like how I'm feeling about certain things on-campus.

Several students on one campus also shared the importance of a Black, female counselor who worked at their institution. They noted what a critical point of support she had been for them. She served as a supporter, encourager, and as a campus advocate for many of the students who were encountering mental health challenges as a result of their difficulties with the campus environment as well as with other personal struggles. At the point of the interviews, this counselor had recently left the institution. The students believed she had been pushed out. They cited racism as a contributing factor to her departure from the institution. They were grateful for her support, but very worried about where they would find similar support in the future.

Lastly, the participants also talked about the way they looked up to the Black faculty and staff at their institution and frequently sought them out for mentorship and to be challenged academically. Christopher stated,

I love talking to [Professor E], mainly because the term "he's real" means a lot to me. He is real... I count real as being like a very street-smart person that can easily be relatable, meaning that if I turned on a Kendrick Lamar song he could tell me like, "oh, I didn't like this because it was trash or I liked it because it was good." He's down to earth, easy to talk to, and approachable. But he is also academically like, whoa, like he challenges me on an academic level. I had one class with him and I would challenge him constantly and he would challenge me back. I loved that because he wouldn't let me be content with my Blackness or my like, lived experience. He would challenge me academically to prove it.

Without a doubt the Black faculty and staff at these institutions are making a critical impact in the lives, and persistence, of Black students. This point was confirmed throughout the fourteen interviews. The students rely heavily on their Black faculty and they expect a lot from them as well. Considering that these institutions employ very small numbers of Black faculty and staff, this finding suggests that a tremendously heavy burden is being placed on the workload of these individuals. Further, it is likely that Black faculty and staff also experience some of the same fatigue that students experience as a result of the campus environment. These are important considerations that will be discussed in greater detail in the sections and chapter to come.

**Spaces of Belonging, Affirmation, and Celebration**

Prior research suggests that identity and interest-oriented activities can also contribute in positive ways to a positive transition and an improved college experience for students of color. In particular, cultural centers have been found to provide additional support and affirmation, which was important for students as they worked to navigate the predominantly White institutional environments they were in during college (Guiffrida et al., 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Patton, 2006). Consistent with prior literature, the findings from this study reveal that, in addition to heavy reliance on Black faculty and staff at the institution, Black students at traditionally White liberal arts

110

colleges also rely heavily on the community and support that they find among the Black

student organizations (BSO) on their campuses. These organizations not only provide the

sense of belonging for many students, but they also seem to be the primary, if not only,

spaces where students find that their identity, heritage, and culture is reflected and

celebrated at the institution. While the students referenced some additional academic,

athletic, and interest based organizations as well, the vast majority of the participants have

found their niche within the institutional environment in spaces that are designed to

highlight, affirm, and empower Black and/or African American students.

     **Spaces of shared interest.** For the participants of this study, spaces of shared

identity and interest were important for their sense of connection and belonging within the

institution. Five of the participants in this study were student-athletes or worked as

managers for athletic teams at their college. In three of the five cases, the athletic team was

a positive space for community and support. Several other participants noted that

academic spaces, which for many of the participants were also spaces to express their

creativity, artistry, and voice, were supportive, and sometimes restorative, spaces for them.

     Dante spoke about finding space to be himself among his team, "I'm super anxious

and very self-conscious, which people don't really expect. I'm very, very sensitive about

how people feel about me. When I'm with my team, I'm never concerned about my

ethnicity or the fact that I'm gay." For Felicia, she appreciated the chance to retreat from

the predominantly White campus environment and focus on her creativity. She said, "I

liked to be in the art room. It's just a place where I could be and be myself and have no

problems." Robert shared this perspective and the outlet that both shared interest and

creative spaces provided him to get away from thinking about some of the challenges and

burdens of campus life.

> In the theater department and in those [basketball] spaces, it's more so things that
> we have in common, and that race doesn't play a factor for basketball. It's about the
> love of basketball. For theater, it's art and creating and just having a good time and
> we don't have to focus on those things.

And, for Cee, who was also a student athlete, he expressed appreciation for the chance to

get away from race concerns as well and find commonality among other athletes at the

campus gym.

> I feel comfortable there because I am an athlete, so when I see people lifting or doing
> their things, I don't have to be like I can't do that because he's White and I'm Black,
> I'm just comfortable with it, because we're all athletes.

For Natalie, a community of belonging for her was among other tutors at her

institution. She spoke highly about her experience within that academic community

including the ways she was supported and challenged by her peers and supervisors. "I've

grown in confidence over the years, so that has helped as well, but there's a diverse group

of people there, and we all challenge each other to get better."

**Spaces of affirmation and celebration.** Many of the students who participated in

the study came from home and high school environments that were mostly Black or

environments that were more culturally diverse than their college.  For some, it was quite a

shock to transition into their TWI. Stephanie describes her situation like this,

> I went to all-Black high school, so not that I necessarily had to ignore racism, but it
> wasn't something I had to deal with on a regular basis because all of my friends
> were Black, the faculty or staff was generally Black.  I had a lot of Black teachers, and
> when I did have White teachers, it was never something that felt uncomfortable. It
> was just like "Yeah, it's fine"… So, it never felt necessarily uncomfortable until like I
> got here and it was very much like, I am Black and a woman and a vast minority.
> What am I going to do with the information now?

112

In his model of college students' sense of belonging, Strayhorn (2012) notes that a sense of belonging, while fundamental for all humans and often necessary for positive outcomes, it also becomes even more important for people in certain contexts and at certain times. Of course, college is a time of personal and social development and students are likely to need to feel a sense of belonging more at this stage of life, when they are away from home and family. Furthermore, for many of the students in this study, as represented by Stephanie's experience above, college was a very different cultural environment for them as well. For many of the students, their racial identity became more salient in the traditionally White college environment. As a result of being in the TWI environment, which for many was a stark change from the home, neighborhood, and high school environment, students expressed appreciation for the community they found among the Black student organizations, campus multicultural center, and African American or ethnic studies classes and programs on their campus.

Betty spoke about a Black women's empowerment group that she participates with at her university. "I have a sense of belonging when I'm with a particular group that's for Black women on this campus… I'm very proud to be a part of it. That group of women keep me sane, which is good. So, that's one space where I feel like I do well." Another North University student, Joyce, spoke about the campus multicultural center as a place of belonging and support as well as the efforts on the part of students to gain access to that space. She said, "I feel very comfortable in the Center. I think one of the main reasons why I do is because people of color before me fought to have that space." Dante from Green College notes that the support of a Black men's empowerment group was important to his experience and a regular place to decompress and find community on-campus, "I think

113

that's awesome, all of us sitting around and talking, joking with each other, or talking about difficult subjects. And it is a celebration kind of in a very informal way." Christopher, also from Green, had a similar perspective, "It's all about that shared experience feeling with [BSO], being able to relate, laugh about some jokes that not a lot of people would understand unless you grew up with that kind of experience."

As part of the interview, the students were asked to reflect on how their culture and their identity were represented and celebrated at the institution.  Students exclusively identified the Black student organizations, and communities, as well as occasionally the African American or ethnic studies courses as places where they saw their identity and culture highlighted and celebrated at the institution. In response to this question, Isabel said, "[BSO] and [BSO]. And I think since I'm an African American studies minor, in those classes as well." She went on to say, "I can't think of things put on solely by faculty and staff that didn't have student involvement where I felt like they were trying to cater to me and my identity."

The participants from North University all mentioned a cultural talent show where Black and African American students had a chance to showcase their creativity and their culture. Joyce described the event saying,

> It's basically a chance for all people of color, with a focus on Black students, to showcase their talents. Whether that's singing, spoken word, or dancing. Just basically any talent that we have. It's really really beautiful. We have a pre-show dinner where we celebrate just us coming together and just the fact that we have talents that we're here at [North] thriving. It's really, really fun. And I think for that night we forget about all the bad that happens here.

This event, put on by the campus BSO, was a primary way that they felt Black culture was celebrated at their institution. For Victoria, and other students, this event was especially

114

meaningful. She said in response to a question about how this celebration makes her feel, "like my culture isn't a waste of time, it isn't unacceptable, like it's actually valued, it's actually something to be remembered, something to be talked about in classes and out in the community, just because." Strayhorn (2012) notes that sense of belonging is related to, and a consequence of, mattering (p.21). For Victoria, the cultural showcase demonstrates to her, and to the community, that she matters.

But, if there are few opportunities to see one's culture represented or celebrated on-campus, how does this impact the student experience? Cee from Prairie College stated,

> We don't have events really. I have friends who go to HBCUs and different universities that have events where African American history or African American society is celebrated or intertwined into what they're doing, but here I don't think we have a lot of things that deal with diversity. Not unless you take a diversity class. But, other than that I don't think there's anything that goes on in the college community that really represents me as an African American, well except when I go to parties and they like the music that African American people make, so we connect on that.

An important question that stems from this research is "can a sense of belonging, which has been demonstrated through research to be essential for student achievement, be fostered if there are no campus opportunities that highlight, celebrate, or affirm experiences outside of the White cultural experience"?

**Spaces of Authenticity.** A finding from Vaccaro and Newman's (2016) research on sense of belonging finds that while all college students share a need for a sense of belonging while in college, the definitions of belonging differs between privileged and minoritized students. For minoritized students, safety and authenticity are important components for belonging. For many of the participants of this study, the Black student organizations provided the authentic space that served as a bolster for negotiating and

115

navigating the TWI throughout their college years. Victoria spoke about how good she feels being part of several different groups that are offered at North University for Black students and women of color. "Through those avenues and groups, I'm beautiful. I'm lovely. I'm supposed to be here. I'm educated. I'm smart. Otherwise, it's like you're just like, I'm here." These spaces of support and empowerment provide her affirmation, but also the opportunity to feel that her authentic self is enough. Christopher described the important role BSO plays for him saying,

> It's a group where all of us where we can say "hey, we had a bad week. And this is why..." Or, "I had this happen to me this week, and this is why." A lot of people often think that people are just being over-dramatic in BSO... or minorities are just trying to milk racism because there's no way in the world that you can experience so much racial tension in a week or in a day. And they don't really understand the fact that that is possible. That it does happen. Some of us are able to develop thicker skin like, for me, I have a very thick skin when it comes to race. But it feels comfortable when you're able to come back to [BSO] in a week and say, "I just feel drained because I'm at this college that doesn't understand me." And having other people say the same thing. And then you all strategize about how to get through the next week.

Christopher's comments show how Black students rely heavily on the chance to rest, recuperate, and prepare for continuing within the mostly White community of the College. Strayhorn's (2012) model also confirms that a sense of belonging can take on added importance at certain times. One such time is during developmental periods, including early adulthood. The undergraduate experience is typically the first time students are away from their families and home community, and working to define for themselves who they are and who they want to be in the future. Because it is a transformative time for the students, the need for belonging takes on heightened importance. Furthermore, a sense of belonging is increasingly important in certain contexts, according to Strayhorn (2012). "Normative congruence suggests that individuals seek environments or settings that are

116

congruent with their own expectations, values, attitudes, and positioning" (Strayhorn,

2012, p. 20). If Black students are finding TWI environments generally incongruent, it is no

surprise that they may find spaces of authenticity and safety, like the BSO, particularly

important during their college years.

**BSO and intersecting identities.** While the vast majority of the students who

participated in this research relied heavily on the BSO and ethnic studies courses as critical

spaces for their support and affirmation as a Black student in the TWI, there were two

participants who noted that they felt on the margins of these groups for various reasons. In

both cases, these students came to college with hopes that they would find connection and

community among their fellow Black students. However, this did not work out for them in

the way the hoped. Bowser, a North University student who identifies as both Black and

queer, struggled to fit in among, what they described as, people of color or queer spaces. In

both instances they felt this was the result of them not having a strong identity as an

activist at a time when students of color and queer students were engaged in significant

advocacy work on the campus.

> If you're not a very loud activist, you're kind of separated in a sense from everyone
> else. I mean, I try to be friends with everybody, but I'm actually friends least with I
> would say POC here and non-white queer people.

Natalie, a Green College student who grew up in a suburb of a large city, came to college

hoping to connect with Black students after attending a mostly White high school honors

program. During her College experience, she found strong connections among many social

justice organizations, but found the BSO and a Black women's empowerment group to be

uncomfortable spaces for her. "When I'm in a setting with only White people, I feel like I

stand out, and then if I'm in a setting with a bunch of Black people, or like [BSO], something

117

like that, I feel uncomfortable there too, because I feel like my experiences are different from theirs." She described that though she knows she is part of Black culture, that is her family's culture, she felt like her experience growing up among mostly White peers caused her to feel some distance and insecurity with her Black peers in college.

Bowser and Natalie's experience is a reminder that the Black students at liberal arts colleges, or any institutional type, are by no means a monolithic group. Intersecting identities and diverse experiences are important factors for consideration both in presenting these findings, but also in considering how these small colleges can attend to the needs of all students. The small college environment is already limited significantly in opportunities available for students of color and therefore offering alternatives to meet the needs of a diverse group of Black students is difficult.

**Segregation, and Segregation by Choice**

As described above, the Black student organizations, African American or ethnic studies academic programs, as well as Black faculty and staff were identified as primary spaces for support and belonging among the participants of this study. In the interviews, students also discussed their observations of the campus environment as a segregated place as well as their attempts, in some cases, to intentionally seek out exclusive spaces for Black students or students of color only.

**Campus segregation.** "Yeah, they [students of differing racial groups] don't interact, so it's not a melting pot; it's pretty much just a plate that has dividers in it." This is Nick's description of the nature of interaction among students of different racial or ethnic groups on his campus at Green College. He goes on to say that there's a lot of mistrust among students of color as it relates to interacting with White students at the College.

There's a preference to stay among people with a similar background, at times due to

concerns about whom they can trust. Nick goes on to say,

> Outside the classroom, it's like your head's on a swivel. Yeah everybody's having a good time, but it only takes one thing to happen before something turns bad. But people, it's kind of like, we all tolerate each other. We can all co-exist even though we don't mix.

Christopher has a more generous perspective of the intercultural nature of the Green

campus as compared to his fellow student, Nick.

> We interact because we're a smaller school. And there are a lot of cross-sectional moments where you want to be involved in something else, like I would love to go to a [Latinx student organization] event and learn more about their culture or during the [international festival], you love like embracing different cultures. But, we often come back to our bases. We can venture out, but we'll definitely come back. Again it goes back to that feeling comfortable, feeling like you can let your guard down with the people that you're around.

> Some of the participants did not understand why there was so much segregation on

their campus. Natalie said,

> So, as far as interactions with students; I think a lot of races, overall, tend to like stick with each other. There are definitely overlaps, but for the most part, like if I go into the cafeteria, I will see like, okay, you're all Black. You are sitting here. All the students sitting over here are mostly White. It's just you can see the divides. But when you talk to people individually, everyone's super friendly. It just feels like there's a divide, just like physically, because people stay in groups.

And, Bowser would prefer if the campus was less segregated. They said, "I just don't

understand it myself, but I'm very inclusive person. I always go down my way to make

someone feel included."

The segregation that the participants described as something they regularly

experience and observe within their institutional environment is discussed and evident as

a trend among much of the campus racial climate literature. This is frequently discussed as

119

a measure taken by students looking to be among people with common interests and experiences. However, in this research, there seemed to be a dynamic where students were making decisions about campus engagement due, in large part, to self-protection.

**Exclusive spaces as a protective measure.** Some students discussed the protective measures that were taken by their families to keep them "on the right track" while in high school as they prepared for college. This included limiting how they engaged with social opportunities in high school and was described by some as "staying out of the streets." In some cases, the students carried this protective measure that was imposed by their parents with them when they came to college. They stayed away from social opportunities initially. This was sometimes in an effort to stay away from the college party scene, and again, to stay focused but at times, it was also because their room felt like a safer and more comfortable space for them at the institution. Robert, who grew up in an urban area, says he became an introvert as a teenager because he chose to stay inside most of the time due to some of the challenges in his home community. When he came to college, this continued.

> All the way up to my junior year I was always inside. I didn't do much. I went to work, went to class, went to my room, so I feel like the transitioning [to college] was okay for me because I knew that I didn't have to like talk to people or anything like that. I could just focus on my studies so I was fine. I always felt like I wasn't missing out on anything, like I wasn't missing out on the parties.

Nick's decision making was similar, "so, freshman year I was definitely in a shell, I didn't really go out much. I was known as the kid who doesn't drink, the kid who doesn't smoke, the kid who doesn't go out, the kid who doesn't party, the kid who's quiet. I was very low-key freshman year and I was okay with it." While Robert and Nick both seemed to make the decision to stay in partly due to their personalities, some other students described their

residence hall room as one of the spaces that they felt most comfortable. At North University, both Stephanie and Victoria spoke about their room as one of few spaces at the institution where they felt safe. They stayed in their rooms, even though that caused them to feel isolated, at times, but they felt it was in the best interest of their mental health and safety.

The differences in dynamics based on the three different institutions become a bit more pronounced with considering how students intentionally sought out identity-specific spaces. Such spaces are extremely limited at Prairie College and therefore were not mentioned in the interviews, while at Green College, students were likely to use Black student organizations as a space for gaining the affirmation and support necessary to be resilient within the TWI environment. However, at North University, many participants spoke about their strong desire to have spaces that were exclusive for Black students given the challenging cultural and political of the campus. Michelle summarizes this perspective, which was shared by Joyce, Betty, and Stephanie in the interviews, and describes her thoughts on these spaces,

> We try to make our space our spaces. We try not to be exclusive, but sometimes we just want to be exclusive. That's just how we are because we go to a predominantly White campus. [White] students have spaces for them, but we're trying to make this space our space. We have our White allies or our White people that we talk to and consider our friends, but sometimes other people other than them try to be our friends or be down for us when we didn't ask them to be. Or, they try to be like our saviors. I know for sure I don't need a savior. We have each other.

North University students spoke about these spaces as important for healing after several semesters of a very tense racial climate on-campus. McGee and Stovall (2015) advocate for educational researchers, in the context of CRT, to centralize the mental health concerns of Black students on predominately White college campuses, including the importance of

spaces for healing for both protection and development (p. 510). The North University

students identified that they needed healing spaces to attend to their mental well-being

with other students of color and they were deliberate in stating that they needed these

spaces to be safe and centered on the experiences of students of color exclusively.

## Facades of Progress

Each of the three institutions that provide the case studies for this research profess

by their leadership and faculty a commitment to cultural diversity and an interest in

creating campuses that are inclusive. At Green College, the mission statement, which was

developed 25 years ago states the institution's commitment to "embrace cultural diversity"

and "prepare responsible citizens of the global community," while at North University,

administrators have been very transparent about sharing community messages on the

institution website that express the value of inclusion within their campus environment.

Furthermore, they developed a statement of inclusion early in 2017, which "reaffirms"

their commitment to fostering an environment, which is inclusive for all. And, finally, at

Prairie College, the mission of the institution demonstrates a commitment of their learning

community to "broadening their perspectives on humanity and culture" and also identifies

diversity as one of seven core values of the institution. Yet, the stories shared by students

as part of this study demonstrate that though the intent of the institutions may be to create

diverse and inclusive campus experience, the reality of the experience often does not live

up to the expectation that was set in the admissions process or by the aspirations of the

institution.

**Seeking a Diverse Environment**

Certainly, the participants, in most cases, were very aware of the institutional demographics and other important aspects of the college or university that they chose to attend. In some cases, though, the students had not had the opportunity to visit the campus before enrolling as first year students. Nevertheless, they had done their research and knew that the institution, and the community around the college, may be very different than their home community. Most of the participants sought out their Midwestern liberal arts college as the result of the financial aid package that was offered to them. In many cases, the school was not the first choice, but when they made the commitment to attend, they felt good about the choice based on the financial aid and the high quality education that they would receive. While a couple of the students considered attending a historically Black college or university, most were primarily considering traditionally White institutions in the Midwest or Northeast regions of the United States. Therefore, most were not basing their decision about attendance on the cultural or racial diversity of the campus community.

In fact, since some of the students grew up in more homogenous communities and schools, they were looking forward to the chance to study at a more diverse college. Natalie considered attending Howard University, but remarked that her choice of Green College was more natural for her "I am in support of diversifying the college environment, in general. So, for me, to go to Howard where they're purposely not diverse, in terms of the race and ethnicity, that to me felt strange." For Stephanie, she also intentionally sought out a more diverse college after her experience of attending mostly Black schools throughout her K-12 experience.

When I was in high school, I said I wanted more diversity because it was just like, all Black people all the time and not that I don't love Black people and being around Black people, I miss it now, but…I wanted to hear White people's views and opinions, though not so loudly and disrespectfully and that's what I got.

In many cases, the students were also sold on the small college environment based on the chance for leadership opportunities, close connections with faculty, and good staff support. In some cases, they got what they hoped for and expected. However, for some, they considered transferring and would have done so if they had the chance.

**Institutional Diversity Efforts**

During the interview, I asked the students if they felt like diversity was a priority at their institution. The students could identify a variety of ways in which the leadership of their institution was working on these issues, but Felicia's response sums up what many of these students articulated in their response, "I think they are trying. I think they are making an effort, but I'm not sure they know how to go about making a good effort, but they are trying to make an effort." Felicia was able to articulate efforts that were made over the years to increase the enrollment and retention of Black students as well as campus responses to supporting undocumented students and increasing inclusion efforts for transgender students. However, her feedback suggests that the efforts that were made had not made the type of impact that has improved the experience for Black students and other students of color. Joyce also felt that her institution was making attempts to improve inclusion within the campus environment, though again, the impact was not necessarily felt as valuable to students.

> I feel like in this past year they've been trying to make it a priority. With hiring new positions and trying to recruit more students of color. But, I feel like the people that they hire do things that they [the administration] want to be done and not do things that will shake up the university to actually benefit students of color.

124

At North University, students had pressed, and protested on their campus, to get administrators to respond to concerns from minoritized students. And, the institution responded with new efforts in response to the student concerns. As a result, the North students identified progress, but also articulated that issues persist. For example, Betty said,

> in policy and in hiring, there's been a more consistent, slow increase… in population…and also in effort to try to better the racial climate, because since my freshman year there has been more Black students on this campus… they've also hired someone who's going to be full-time in the ethnic studies department so that's another person of color on this campus in terms of staff and faculty. There also the new positions that have been on this campus because of diversity and inclusion. There are more administrators who are of color as well. So, there's been some good things, but since my freshman year there have also been bad things.

Stephanie also offered an example of efforts to respond to student concerns, but that the effort ultimately created new issues for students. She described that in previous year the multicultural center was located in the basement of a campus building near a campus bar. Therefore, the space smelled of alcohol and students were concerned that loud, drunk, White men were frequently nearby the multicultural space, which was intended to be their safe space. As a result of students raising concerns, the space was moved to a more centralized location. However, she stated,

> there's a lot more White people in there now just because it's on the first floor and it's visible… there are super soft couches and there's always food in there and there's a TV with cable, so it just seems like a really nice place to go and hang out when it's supposed to be a safe space. So, there were upsides and downsides to like moving that.

Similar to Stephanie's perspective, Betty went on to point out that there were times that the administrators and faculty who were trying to make efforts just did not understand the needs of students of color, and therefore the efforts did not have as much impact. She said,

> They have good intentions, but because we're on a PWI, and the Board of Trustees is majority White, the committee on diversity is majority White, like it's just hard for them to truly understand like what we need to fix and how we need to fix it and how it should look, and how it should be procedurally. And I think that's because our administration and because faculty and staff can't correctly or accurately address people of color needs because there's just a lack of education or a lack of understanding the impacts of whatever decision they decide to make... But I appreciate the effort.

There's a recognition on the party of many North students that the institution has made attempts to respond to feedback. However, those efforts do not seem to be making the impact that is expected. Betty's point is aligned with critical race theory from a perspective that it is crucial in educational environments for people of color to have the opportunity to name their own reality, through counterstories. Often, progress is limited because the voices of people of color are not central in the process of making institutional change.

While student advocacy led to new efforts at North University, Cee points out that a lack of issues raised by students of color at Prairie College means that his institution has not put new resources to diversity efforts.

> I don't know if they really care about it or if it becomes a problem then they'll deal with it later on. But, it's not something that has changed over time, but it's also not something that's really a problem because there's never been a problem with interactions between people. So, I guess there's never been an emphasis on it because there's not been an occasion that has occurred to make them say, "well we might need to look at this differently or we may need to bring in something that's going to make students feel more comfortable or less threatened."

From Cee's perspective, there have not been significant concerns shared by Black students or other groups of minoritized students. Therefore, he believes his institution has not had a need to invest more deliberately in diversity and inclusion services or resources. It is possible that Prairie College will react to issues if they arise, rather than proactively creating opportunities that help to thwart issues from developing in the first place.

Dante points out that from his perspective, his institution, Green College, does value diversity and makes a concerted effort.

> I think that diversity could be more prevalent maybe by terms of representation, but the College is definitely committed to diverse thinking, encouraging different people talking to each other. There's a political theory that says there's an inherent value in diversity just because if you're around different people then they know different things than you. No one person is smarter than everybody. It's the idea of aggregate knowledge and being around people who know different things than you. Picking up different experiences. I think at the College that's ingrained in the culture. I do think that there's definite weaknesses in terms of minority staff.

Dante's point here, however, seems to provide an example of the institution's efforts, which appear to be more aligned with the interest convergence concept within CRT. According to Dante's example, all individuals in the campus environment benefit from diverse thinking and learning within an environment of diversity, and the institution promotes that. Yet, as is suggested in the prior section, Black students have identified faculty of color as critical support resources for their persistence and success, and Green College has not made progress in this area, according to Dante's experience.

**Diversity as a Marketing Priority**

At Green College, a number of the participants discussed their belief the diversity was a priority at the institution primarily as a public relations concern.  Several Green students made strong points about this in the interviews that they were told in the admission process that the campus was diverse, but their experience of the campus did not live up to what they expected. Christopher had a lot to say on this point,

> I think that it's a marketing priority.  I think that it looks good when we have diverse people on posters, I think it looks good when we have diverse people on panels. Diversity for me goes far beyond...don't take this wrong...it goes far beyond cultural events on campus.  Even though I love the professors, I've also heard of experiences from other people where diversity in the classroom is not there, from a professor's standpoint.  Not understanding someone else's opinion, or making them feel

127

uncomfortable because of their race or ethnicity or how they choose to think. And that becomes bothersome to me because we talk about embracing diversity… you sold us on embracing diversity and we saw the pictures and you got us in the door. But then how are you going to retain us if we don't see that in the classroom setting, if we don't see that in other areas on our campus experience?

Several students discussed diversity as a priority only as a means to meet enrollment goals.

Isabel said, "Sometimes, I see it as like, we've got to reach our quota. It's like, a selling point

more so than anything else, and that bothers me." Nick's comments align as well,

> In my honest opinion, I believe diversity is a selling point for this college. I think it's a priority because it's beneficial for the college to get more kids to come here. And a lot of kids I've talked to were agreeing with me saying that you see diversity on the brochures, but not in the campus. I think that diversity is, yeah, I think it's something that's said but not really met.

At North University, Victoria identified a similar concern about whether her

institution was truly committed to diversity and inclusion efforts or if progress and efforts

were made only at times when the institution needed to respond to a specific incident or

concern that were raised loudly by students. "I feel like this is a business organization and

they're primarily more concerned about how much money is coming in. Especially students

of color, we're just a number to them." She went on to discuss the efforts that were made by

the institution in response to student advocacy. Victoria went on to say,

> I still feel like it's the same thing, but now there's a band-aid put over it trying to hide the issue with the hiring of more people of color… I know this past school year there was a big push to bring a lot of students of color, predominately Black students into the institution, but I feel like that was only done because [North] was having the [student advocacy]… and it's like, if you don't do this, then you'll be portrayed negatively.

128

Victoria suggests that the efforts were not only reactive to student issues, but that they were made as a public relations measure for the institution. Christopher felt similar with an issue at his institution.

> In my speech for commencement, there's one sentence that alludes to me being the first African American speaker in nearly twenty years, that's how it reads. And I heard through the grapevine that there are people associated with the commencement decisions that were concerned that if I use that line would it represent the values of [Green] correctly, or would it make the college look kind of bad. And that pissed me off. It made me really upset and frustrated because that's not my concern, that's not my problem. So, what if...it's not my fault that you didn't pick somebody else in twenty years, that's just the fact. And that made me irritated and frustrated... That's the problem, that's the problem that a lot of people think about. Sometimes we're so political and so concerned about our image. Like, yeah, I'll look good at commencement being a Black person on the stage, that's good, that markets good. But, don't get into talking about the real issue, because then that makes us look bad.

Christopher's example provides a strong example of the facades of progress regarding racial diversity and inclusion at traditionally White institutions. On the surface, progress is found, but it masks the on-going evidence of a culture of racism that persists despite progressive interest and efforts.

### The Magnifying Effect of the Small College Environment

The residential liberal arts college is, by design, a small and closely connected community. These types of institutions have pushed against a more vocational-oriented education from their initial development and have recognized that "their so-called product is something other than a negotiable instrument designed to guarantee employment" (Graubard, 1999, p. IX). This product that these types of institutions aspire to is about engaging in an academic community with diverse peers, faculty, and staff and where a high value is placed on the opportunity for discourse, connection, and care within the community (Graubard, 1999). Certainly this description aligns with the goals of the

institutions that provide the case studies for this research. And, therefore, the students that

chose to attend these schools are expecting to engage in an academically rigorous, but

community oriented educational environment. They likely came to college expecting to be

challenged, but also expecting to be supported. Many, as described in the prior section on

the "Facades of Progress", also expected a more culturally inclusive community than what

they believe they have experienced during their time in college.

The residential liberal arts college are extremely insular by nature as compared to

mid-size or large research universities. They are known to be highly student-centered

(Astin, 1999) and community-oriented, and they advertise the educational experience that

they provide as such. "In order to differentiate themselves from the larger and more

anonymous research institutions, such colleges have cultivated their idyllic images as small

and intensely caring communities where individuals both count and flourish…" (Gomes,

1999, p. 110). Furthermore, these colleges generally require students to live on-campus or

very near to campus and the campus environment serves at the primary place of

engagement for students during their four years. As it were, nine of the 14 participants of

this study were out-of-state students at their institution and only two of the 14 students

did not reside in on-campus housing at the time of the data collection. Even the two

commuting students previously lived in campus housing. Therefore, all of these students'

academic and social lives during college were connected to their campus, and experienced

the opportunity and challenge that came along with it. In the data analysis process, it

became clear that the small college environment, and the insular nature along with the high

expectations for care and community, has a magnifying effect in regards to some of the

issues that the students experience. This section explores how the issues that students face

are, at times, magnified as a result of studying in a small environment. The small and residential college environment is nuanced, however, and therefore this section also explores some benefits of the small college community.

**Small Numbers – Being the Spokesperson**

One of the prominent experiences that students shared in their interviews is that they are often the only Black student or student of color in their classes. This is not surprising because the enrollment of Black students at the three colleges only comprised six percent (Green), four percent (North), and three percent (Prairie) of the overall student population. Cee shared that in four semesters at Prairie College, he had not yet taken a course with another Black student. When discussing this challenge, Betty described her resentment of this experience that she believes is the result of attending this particular university.

> There are definitely times I have been the only Black person in my class or the only person of color in my classes. And those experiences I notice right off the bat. I've never had to think about that before here… it's not frustrating, it's just annoying because like I wouldn't be in this predicament had I not been in this school. But, it's a learning experience and that's what I take it as.

Despite the chance, as Betty described, to learn something from the experience, many of the students shared this similar experience of being hyper self-aware how they are perceived when they are put in this type of environment. Many acknowledged the expectation to be a spokesperson for their race, and feeling out of place while trying to learn the course material. Bowser said,

> My experience in my classes is pretty interesting sometimes, because… besides the ethnic studies class, every class there was probably like one of two Black people in the class… Especially with the sciences. I kind of feel like oh, I'm representing my race. It's like, this is awkward.

131

Stephanie described her experience being the only Black person in the room and the way

she has handled these challenging situations,

> It's interesting, because generally I'm at least the only Black woman and most of the time the only Black person in the room. There's sometimes some other people of color, but generally I'm the only Black woman or Black person. And so, like normally it's not a problem, unless someone brings up race and then all those lovely eyes turn towards me, or if there's a reading that's particularly uncomfortable and I feel the professor looking very sadly for making me have to read it. It just depends on how I feel at the time, if I'm just not looking to give a response for all Black everywhere, then I just won't say anything, even if the professor's like "Do you have a comment?", I'll be like "No, I'm good. Let's see what you all figure out".

This regular experience of navigating the mostly White environment, and how to

manage the uncomfortable classroom situations as well as the some of the outside the

classroom challenges certainly takes a toll on students. Michelle discussed the mental toll

that she's experienced as a result of several years in the environment. She also expressed

that she often does not feel like her campus community understands how burdened Black

students can feel as a result. Her comments reflect the need for more support from faculty,

staff as well as counseling support, in order to assist Black students with persistence at

TWI.

> Sometimes I've been in classes where I'm the only Black student so that's been weird. If we talk about a topic that is related to my culture, sometimes I feel like the professor will want me to speak on it, but I don't. They ask me, and I'll just say "no, I'm not going to answer." I don't feel comfortable answering. Sometimes I feel like some of the students just don't want to work with me. Sometimes I feel like the professors just don't care about the students' wellbeing. This year there's been times when getting up to go to class is difficult. A lot of times I've missed just because I didn't have the mental capacity to go. I sometimes feel like the professor doesn't care, and so that turns me off as well.

Walton and Cohen's (2007) along with Strayhorn's (2012) model suggests that

belongingness within academic settings is even more important for underrepresented

students when considering academic achievement. The stories shared by Michelle and

other participants suggest that the onlyness experience (Harper et. al, 2011) in the classroom wears heavily on their mental health and may negatively contribute to academic outcomes as a result. Further, this issue may be magnified in the liberal arts environment as students have the expectation that their faculty will understand, and care, about this challenge. But, from Michelle's perspective, there is not the acknowledgment from the professors as she would expect.

**Social Media in the Age of Trump**

Another challenge of the small environment is related to the proliferation media and social media attention on critical racial, cultural, and political issues in recent years. The campus racial climate at these three institutions most certainly heated up during the 2016 presidential campaign and after the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States. Each of the fourteen interviews occurred within the first 100 days of his presidency. From the election in November 2016 until the early weeks of May, there was significant discourse as well as executive action from Trump that caused concern among the students who participated in this study. They also experienced a change in their perceptions of the liberal environments that they chose to attend for college as the saw an increased boldness among their conservative peers. Many participants articulated concerns about the increased presence of Trump ideology and preferred that their institutions take a definitive anti-Trump stand. Isabel shared her perspective by saying,

> I think the whole Trump thing, that's made me very weary of the institution. A lot of people, they're like, I hate [Green], I can't wait to be done. I've always felt a high respect for the institution, like academically. There's things wrong with us socially, but academically, I feel like we're top notch. I've always respected the institution for that, but I understand having to satisfy everyone and be there for everyone and be an open and comfortable space for everyone, but I just feel as though the Trump flags in the windows, that's too much for me.

In the residential environment of Green, the visible support for Trump with signs in windows of the residence halls was a contentious situation for many students at the institution. While many noted that this was free speech, Isabel, and others, were bothered by it and wished the institution would take a stronger stand in opposition. Christopher said, in response to the institution taking strong stands on issues,

> So what, people will get offended. I get offended all the time, like half the time on-campus I'm offended because people don't understand. So, like, let's offend everybody and just say what we need to say straightforward, so that we can all learn together and we can all grow together.

Robert described being very surprised by the level of support for Trump by members of the campus community. This was unexpected for him. When he came to the College as a first year student, he believed it to be a more liberal place, but four years later, he had a different impression. This is analogous of the discussion of the "facades of progress" above.

> As I've gone through my college career, I've heard more stories and more things about what people have said or done so it's like maybe it's not really unified on-campus as I thought it was coming in as a freshman. Maybe there is some type of divide and I think that's more clear now with a lot of people having these Trump flags in their window and it's more like it's us against them kind of thing.

Dante, on the other hand, felt that the Trump support on the Green campus was likely low, but that the election of Trump had enhanced the racial climate concerns in significant ways since it was forefront on student's minds.

> It felt like half the country voted against me in a way that was all too personal. Like insanely saddening. If they didn't think they were voting against me, if they didn't think they were voting against Black people and gay people and minorities, they cared so little about what he said that they were still willing to vote for him, which still felt like they were voting against me, you know? That was really sad. That's why I think my attitude has changed about the racial climate. I'd been a lot more comfortable at the school, in general, before that. If we took a poll at the school, he'd get less than ten percent. I'm sure of it at [Green] College. It still just made me sad.

In a small campus environment, even a small number of vocal supporters that

demonstrated support for Trump's racist views and actions were able to make a major

impact on the student's perspectives of the campus environment. Social media seemed to

heighten the divides and further magnified the divisions and increased concern about the

inclusivity of the campus community.

Stephanie shared that she felt like her campus was making progress ahead of the

Trump election, but then quickly saw regression.

> I kind of felt that it was changing and I thought that it was and it was good, until
> Trump got elected and then it was like all the happy racists just crawled out of a
> hole or something and went to Facebook and just trolled every queer, Black, Brown,
> person of color, anything that wasn't like White, cisgender, heterosexual, and male.

Joyce shared similar ways in which the social media application, Yik Yak, which allows

users to remain anonymous stirred up tension on her campus.

> It's crazy the things that are said on there and it can instantly can just ruin your day.
> So I stay clear from that.... It's being used heavily here and there and the thing that is
> upsetting about it is that there have been a lot of threats to students. Specific
> student names are used, and of course, it's only students of color. There has been
> nothing done about it.

Within a small campus environment, social media becomes even more personal. Students

generally know one another, or can easily find connections with other students, so when

social media is used in an aggressive or hurtful way, the impact to student's sense of

belonging can be quickly impacted. Furthermore, Yik Yak presents safety concerns to

students since there is no way to identify who is making the comment. Students at both

Green College and North University commented that the presence of Yik Yak, and the

comments made, were very unsettling and caused them to question their safety on-campus.

While Dante shared the perspective that social media was a problem on his campus, he was concerned that students were shifting further into polarized perspectives without taking the time to truly talk about issues, which is what he wished would have happen on his campus during the difficult times post-election.

> I feel like the lead up and discussion around it was very [Green]. I don't like Donald Trump flags either, but if I feel like posting it on social media and making it an issue of characterizing every single person who voted for Donald Trump as a racist was not the right thing to do. Maybe the discussion was very [Green College]. I think that there are people who are like well that's his First Amendment right to put up that flag. Of course, the people who have the flag, they didn't say a single thing. They just kept the flag up, and didn't a single word. Then another flag pops up on campus, another one. It's kind of catty. But, putting something on blast and social media? I just don't think that that was right. It's not a hate crime to have the flag up. It's someone expressing political beliefs even though it's a stupid political belief. I think that some people are too sensitive about it, but then I'm never one to call someone too sensitive because if you feel it, then it's valid.

Dante identifies the struggle that he, and many other students at the College were facing, which was difficulty navigating a more polarized political climate in the country and on-campus. It seemed as though he hoped that members of the community could come together to discuss in productive ways, but instead, they often aired their perspectives via social media, which served to further the political divides, increase campus tensions, and likely encouraged students to retreat to people and spaces on-campus where they felt safe.

**Close Relationships with Faculty – Care and Opportunity**

While the small college environment did offer some additional challenges as it relates to the small enrollment of Black students, as well as the added challenges brought on by social media usage in these tight knit communities, there are ways that the small, liberal arts environment provides opportunities for added support for students during challenging times and as they worked to persist towards graduation. True to the liberal arts

mission of a strong commitment to the teaching and advising of undergraduate students, overwhelmingly, the participants in this study found good support and positive experiences with their faculty. Over and over again students discussed how relationships with faculty, and the support that they received from them, were a critical resource as they navigated college in a TWI environment. When talking about her favorite professors at North University, Michelle says,

> everyone knows that I love them. Every time when their name is mentioned, I just get happy. They are very supportive and helpful. Even though they don't look like me, I know that they will do anything to help support me and make sure that I'm okay, so I really appreciate that.

Cee spoke about the professors at Prairie College and how interactive they were, even more than he expected.

> Some teachers will email you because they know something is wrong and they'll be like, 'I don't care what's wrong on my end, I just want to know that you're okay. We don't have to talk about school, but if something is bothering you, or you are sick, or if there is something I can help you with, just let me know.'

He was appreciative knowing that he mattered to the faculty and that they were willing to look in on him when he was experiencing difficulty. Betty talked about her faculty advisors going above and beyond for her. They were not only there to help her with academic or career oriented issues, but they choose to support her through other issues that she was experiencing.

> It's not a professor-student relationship, it's more like a mentor-mentee relationship. But I value those because I know what I want to do with my life, but I need a little bit of guidance and those two or three people have been there when I needed it... They most definitely went out of their way to help me.

Robert found the same from faculty at Green College. In particular, one faculty member really pushed him with his writing in an area where she saw a lot of potential in him. He attributed a lot of his readiness for the next steps of his career to the ways she supported and helped him. "[Professor J] is so helpful and she really wants me to do good too and she's helping me with different opportunities and finding for me so that's a good thing too."

The dedication of faculty and staff came through strongly in the interviews. And, while students did identify some challenges with their experiences with faculty, as described earlier, the overwhelming response was that faculty contributed significantly in positive ways to their college experience and success. The small college setting provides great opportunities for close, caring, and helpful interactions. Support from faculty in the face of campus discrimination was found by Hurtado et al. (2015) to be extremely important for students and helped them to feel a sense of belonging in their campus communities despite challenges as a result of the racial climate. Given the many other challenges of the traditionally White liberal arts environment for Black students, it seems that a great deal of pressure is ultimately placed on the faculty and staff whom are found to be trustworthy mentors and advisors.

## Black Identity: Confidence and Empowerment

In research on race and college students, racial identity models are often used to in differentiating how racial identity of African American college students impacts perceptions of the campus racial climate, student engagement on-campus, and academic achievement at predominantly White institutions. The research design of this study did not incorporate a racial identity model into the design, though perhaps that may have been helpful as many participants spoke at length about the impact of confidence in their Black

identity, or how the strengthening of their racial identity while in College, was an important part of their experience and persistence in college. One commonly used model for understanding racial identity of African American college students is the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), which seeks to understand the "significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to their membership within the Black racial group" (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998, p. 19). The MMRI incorporates four aspects, which make up racial identity. The first is racial salience, which indicates the importance of race to the self-concept at a particular time and place. The second aspect is racial centrality, which is the extent which an individual defines her/himself by race (normally stable over time). The third component is racial regard, which has two components. Private regard refers to positive or negative feelings towards one's own racial group (African Americans). Public regard refers to how an individual perceives others to feel about African Americans. Lastly, racial ideology involves the beliefs or attitudes about how African Americans should act and interact with others (Sellers et al., 1998, pp. 24 – 28). This model does not presume movement through stages, nor does it assume that all African Americans see the role of race in their lives in the same way. The MMRI has been used to study many different outcomes including self-esteem (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998), academic engagement (Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007), organizational involvement (Chavous et al., 2003, Chavous, 2005; White-Johnson, 2012), and academic achievement (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998). Most studies have found that having high racial centrality, where race is important to the self-concept, and high private racial regard, which involves thinking positively about African Americans, is associated with positive outcomes for African American college students.

The stories of students reflected in this study is consistent with this prior literature. Students not only seek out the Black student organizations on their campuses as a space for celebration and affirmation of identity as described previously, but they also articulate confidence in who they are (high racial centrality), as well as their pride when having their voices and perspectives heard and seeing the prominence of Black peers, faculty, and staff, which is consistent with high private racial regard.

**Finding Voice, Using Voice**

One of the tenets of critical race theory, which provides the theoretical framework for this study, is a commitment and recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color including the sharing of individual stories and naming one's own reality (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The participants of this study shared many moments of their college experience when having the chance to use their voice to share their experience and advocate for their concerns was empowering and positive for them.

Felicia spoke about concern that she had early in her college experience when friends, typically White friends, often felt a need to speak for her when issues of disrespect came up in interactions on their campus. While Felicia was aware that these friends were attempting to offer support and be an ally in the way that they were familiar with, she found it problematic at times, "for a while I had to say, if it makes me feel uncomfortable I'll let them know, but I appreciate that you are trying to have my back, but I have my own back and I'll tell you when I'm uncomfortable or when I'm unhappy."

Similarly, Isabel preferred opportunities when she could speak for herself and raise perspectives that were important to her experience with fellow students, but also with faculty and staff. She talked about having more opportunities to do so in her senior year at

140

Green College. "I think I found my niche with faculty and staff and being in certain leadership type roles. I feel like that's very empowering for me. When I did the panel or when I led the discussion about for the Black aesthetics class." She speaks to the empowerment that she felt when she had opportunities to be in leadership, to share her perspective, and work alongside her faculty and staff. This was significant for Isabel's journey in college because some of her prior experiences as described in the interview seemed to be limiting, or even stifling for her. Yet, as she received more opportunities to share her perspective in more meaningful ways, she began to find where she felt she fit in within the campus community.

Robert also spoke about the developmental process to find his voice, and his calling, while in college. In the early years of college, Robert described how he stayed to himself a lot. He had a small group of friends from his athletic team, but he avoided the social scene at the institution and kept himself under the radar. He shared that he very rarely spoke up in class and he rarely went to speak to his faculty outside of the class in their office hours, which is encouraged at Green College. He described his challenges with the science curriculum at the College, but eventually found his place within the humanities. In his senior year he wrote a play, which was performed on-campus and share elements of his, and his fellow Black students', experience at a predominately White college. When Robert reflected on finding his voice, he stated,

> I'm passionate about play writing and I'm passionate about it because it is through my plays that I have a voice and I can create these messages that need to be seen, and you know, I have a passion for it because I enjoy a process as well. The thinking process behind it, that I put into it. I enjoy all of that. I never got that from science. Never got that from science because with science, it's always this plus this equals that, or this happens because of this, but when I'm writing a play or in theater, it can always change. It's not like...it's not a fact. It's your mind so I fell in love with that.

Robert describes a holistic and empowering experience that he has as a result of play

writing, which provides a reflective experience of developing his art, a chance to challenge,

change, or alter perspectives, and a chance to get out the messages that he believes needs

to be heard by society. Finding space in college to share this voice was transformative for

him.

Among the participants, Christopher was undoubtedly one student who was not

only confident with his voice and his perspective on his campus, but was provided

opportunities to use it. He understood the power that he had developed over the years and

was not afraid to use it to advocate for the perspective of Black students.

> When I first started on the council, I noticed it was a predominantly White council as well and they're making tough decisions for the College. And when I first began, I chose to sit back because again, I didn't know how well it would be received.  But now that I'm older and a grown man now, I'm a lot more vocal in all of these areas and corners.  So, for me, being a leader on campus and having the opportunities to sit at tables where decisions were being made made me feel uncomfortable because I didn't see [racial] representation in that leadership area. Now, because I've experienced a lot more, I have no real problem with going to like a dean of students, faculty meeting, or something like that and saying, you all need to do better because African Americans are feeling uncomfortable. Or, going to board of trustee members and saying that this is how we actually feel and you need to do something about it.

Christopher worked hard during his four years of college to put himself in situations where

he had a seat at the table for decision making at the institution. He recognized that if he was

there, he needed to use the platform to the best of his ability to benefit his experience and

that of fellow students.

**Black student prominence.** In addition to finding chances to have a seat at the

table affirmative, students also shared how important it was to them to see their Black

peers in positions of prominence. Dante identified several times when he was affirmed by

the prominence of his peers in addition to his own accomplishments. These situations

served as motivators for his own persistence at the institution.

> "I think of T getting senior class speaker, that meant a lot to me. T getting student body president and programming president meant a lot to me. Me getting elected president of my fraternity meant more than just getting the president of the fraternity because they were electing a Black gay kid to lead them. Then, they elected another Black guy after me. This majority White group saw that leadership in him. It was not like him being Black was the reason...You know what I'm saying? This is part of him. He's Black and he's a great leader so we're going to elect him because he's a great leader. There's stuff all over. When S won [a prominent leadership award]. That meant a lot to me. Those types of small things. I got a school record. I'm the only Black person on the record board."

In a small TWI environment, the prominence of Black students, as well as faculty and staff,

is immensely impactful for students. Dante described these experiences as ways that he

sees his Black identity celebrated at the institution, which contributed to him feeling pride,

but also a sense of belonging at the school. Several students at Green College also spoke

about the importance of seeing Black people in prominent roles at the institution, including

as a senior administrator. Knowing that there was a person who shared their identity at

among the President's cabinet gave them more confidence that their experience would be

considered at the highest level.

**Confidence in College: "I know who I am"**

Participants spoke about the confidence that they had in their Black identity and

how this served to moderate the racial climate challenges that they experienced at the TWI.

Cee grew up in the southeast part of the United States in a very diverse community and

coming to college in the Midwest offered some challenge, but he talked about how his high

regard for his African American community and background enabled him to more easily

deal with some of the challenges at Prairie College.

I know myself and I know where I come from and I know my heritage and the things that I do and how positive they are. If anyone else wants to ever figure it out how people operate in my community or in my race, I'm happy to talk about it with them.

Betty also spoke about how the way that she grew up, including knowing and celebrating her cultural heritage, was extremely important to her while at her TWI, and in the mostly White community where the university is located.

Growing up where I grew up gave me a lot of who I am now, which is necessary in a place like this and [North University]. I grew up with a lot of Haitian culture, because my parents are immigrants from Haiti. They came here when they were young. So, I was born here so, I had Haitian culture, had Black culture because of my school and people I was involved with in my neighborhood. Just like music, language like a lot of slang, stuff like that. And then just like Brooklyn culture. But yeah, growing up there was very hard...I wouldn't say like as hard as some people have it, but there were definitely family issues, there was definitely money issues, there was definitely like gang crime in my neighborhood. So, there was a lot of like social pressure, but I wouldn't trade it because I'm able to know who I am and how I am and how I fit in different environments because I had such a grounded foundation when I was home.

Betty was attending North University on a full tuition scholarship. She noted the "blessing" of the education that she was able to access, but as she discussed above, she recognized that the primary reason she was able to navigate challenges on her campus was the result of having confidence in herself, her culture, and her background. This provided a grounded foundation for further growth.

Finally, Christopher expressed his own personal confidence that was developed both as a young person, but also through leadership opportunities in college.

I'm at the point in my life where I'm okay, I'm content with being, and actually I absolutely love being, a Black, educated man. I'm very comfortable in my skin, there's never once been a place in recent years where I was like, man my life would be so much better if I was a different race. So, nothing that is said to me in a racist or malicious intent is going to make my skin crawl.

In this study, students clearly articulated the ways that having a foundation rooted in a strong understanding of, and pride in, their cultural identity was positive for them as they navigated some of the challenges and racism that they experienced in college.

**Developing Black identity in college.** In addition to students sharing the ways that their racial identity and positive self-concept was developed as children, and brought with them to college, some participants shared how their college experience provided a chance to further explore and understand more about their background, heritage, and culture. Bowser talked about growing up in a mostly White environment and thinking very little about their racial identity when they came to college. They said,

> I didn't really actually identify strongly as Black or African-American until I came to college, actually. People didn't really care about race where I was from. They would just make jokes, but I was just like I'll joke as well with you, so I didn't really identify strongly as that. Then, throughout high school, I kind of identified as an Oreo, if you know what that is.

Bowser commented as part of the interview about some of their challenges to fit into the Black community at North University. I sensed that this saddened Bowser to some degree. Yet, Bowser also spoke about enjoying the chance to learn more about their racial identity through ethnic studies courses at the institution. The salience of their racial identity seemed to be growing while in college.

Nick spoke very directly about his experience with developing a greater understanding of his Black identity while in College and the good experience that it was for him to get involved with the Black student organizations and with the African American studies courses at the College starting in his sophomore year.

> I enjoy it, so I think it's good to be around people who look like me and I enjoy learning more about things that I didn't know and kind of seeing more of the problems that Black people are facing that I was otherwise ignorant of because I feel like I am getting rid of my ignorance that I had before coming to school here. So, I

145

guess going through the experience of becoming "woke," as they would say it. And so, I think it's been a good experience of me being on my journey to waking up from where I come from and being exposed to my own identity because it's who I am. I am Black and there's nothing I can do about it, so I want to embrace it and learn more about it and I do that through being around other Black people.

Nick is a business major and he anticipates that he will go on to graduate school eventually. He shared with me that he hopes to attend an HBCU for graduate school. He never considered attending an HBCU for undergrad, but he believes the HBCU environment will be an excellent place for continuing his personal and professional growth in the future. Similarly, though she grew up with a strong connection to her culture, Joyce received mentorship from other Black students at her institution and as a result began to develop a strong voice for social justice.

> It feels like I know why people are in certain situations that they're in. I look at them so differently. Me and my step dad talk a lot, but every time it comes down to talking about racial issues and racial institutions he just does not get the fact that there are systems there that they've put in place for people not to succeed.

She went on to say,

> And I'm not even learning these things in classes. It's just things that I'm learning from juniors and seniors and past seniors that have left. Because when we came here our freshmen year we came into turmoil… learning from them it prompted me to do my own research.

From what she described, Joyce was being asked to serve in a variety of leadership positions on her campus, including serving on campus committees, as a resident assistant, and, as president of the BSO. The mentorship Joyce received from older students in the community was instrumental for her in growing her capacity to lead and advocate for Black students, and other marginalized groups, at the institution.

**What if there is no space for Black identity development?** As described above, a number of participants discussed the ways in which having a positive racial identity when

they came to college, and learning further about their identity, was an important component to their success in the TWI. This is consistent with a number of other studies of K-12 and higher education environments (Chavous et al., 2003, Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Smalls et al., 2007), which show that there are benefits to engaging African American college students in activities that provide them with the opportunity to learn about and affirm their racial identities. Acknowledging that racial discrimination exists in society and discussing that shared experience with others may provide needed comfort for students in a predominantly White environment, which encourages them to persist in the face of academic and social challenges.

However, in some small liberal arts college environments, there may be few opportunities for exploration of one's Black racial identity. Consideration of the impact of this to Black student development, persistence, and achievement is important. Can students in environments where there are few opportunities for exploration, celebration, and affirmation of their identity achieve their highest potential?  Of the three institutions in this study, Prairie College was the institution with the fewest opportunities for students to engage with opportunities that focus on the unique experience of African Americans or Black culture. There is no Black student organization and no African American or ethnic studies program. Further, among the three cases, Prairie College enrolled the smallest number of Black students as well as had the fewest number of Black faculty. Only two students from Prairie College agreed to participate in this research study. This small sample makes it difficult to broadly understand the experience of Black students at that particular institution. However, I found myself wondering through the data collection process if the limited student interest was a result of the lack of opportunities for campus

147

engagement specifically focused on the distinctive experience of Black students. Therefore, considering the research presented earlier that demonstrates that students with high racial centrality and high positive racial regard experience better results in college (Rowley et al., 1998; Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Smalls et al., 2007), students at Prairie College may be less supported, engaged, and therefore less productive than they could otherwise be as a result of the few opportunities available to them.

**Resilience in the TWI Environment**

In spite of the challenges of the campus racial climate that students described as a part of their experience at these institutions, the students involved in the study were having successful experiences for the most part. Seven of the 14 students were within two months of graduation and five other students described feeling very academically confident and expressed the belief that they would persist to graduation. Only two participants, both students at North University, articulated concern about their academic status. One sophomore student spoke about failing and worried that she would not persist at this institution. Another student, though a junior, felt that she was struggling to connect with her major department faculty and expressed a strong lack of trust in the administration to help her if she encountered challenges in her final year at the institution.

The majority of students were feeling confident in their college experience credited both their personal drive to succeed as well as a strong support system. Robert talked about his philosophy in college despite challenges saying he was committed to "remaining driven to graduate, remaining humble. Being a good person. Spreading positivity." Isabel stated regarding her support system,

> there were a lot of people at the institution including professors, faculty, friends that
> I hold dearly, which are very few and far between. I think I've gone through a lot in

the past four years, and I feel like each time I've gotten over something or through something, that's contributed to me being a better or stronger person. I think that's contributed to my success. My determination to complete the four years.

Isabel speaks about resilience throughout her story, which involved athletic injuries, challenges with find the right major, academic challenges early in her years, and even some relational challenges with family friends and peers in addition to the draining environment that she experienced on the campus. Yet her determination, and support system, kept her going.

Cee talked about his style of resilience as well, "I've always gone by the saying 'get comfortable with being uncomfortable.'" His college is far from home, but his openness to embrace the experience for what it is and despite challenges that come up, are part of his strategy for success.

> I think all the people who are here who are African American are here for one purpose and that's to get a good education and walk with our heads high and when we have a problem, we go to the person that we feel we can trust, because at the end of the day it's all about getting our education.

Natalie spoke about her drive to succeed, but also about how she hopes to take what she gained in college and pay it forward in the future. "I'm trying to see if I have a limit to how much I can push myself and how surprised I can make myself for what I've done... And, also I want to hopefully become a professor later and help diversify the academic world."

# V. DISCUSSION, CONSIDERATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was developed out of a concern that the traditional discussions of college student success and retention does not adequately consider the ways in which the campus racial climate may be limiting Black students from achieving their full potential. The longstanding debate over why students leave college tended to focus more on individual student characteristics rather than focusing on the ways in which the college or university could work to foster an environment that promotes success for traditionally marginalized and minoritized students. Therefore, this study endeavored to explore the racialized experiences of Black students at three traditionally White liberal arts colleges with the hopes of better understanding the ways that these institutions can work to improve the experiences of Black students and ultimately positively contribute to their college success.

Aligned with Critical Race Theory, this study was developed with a goal of centering the voices of Black college students and understanding how they experience the campus environment. Institutional mission, statistics, and discussions of programs and services are highlighted to provide context for understanding the three institution cases; however, the voices of the students are the focus. As the findings in the prior chapter expose, and the discussion below will further explore, the participants described many instances of racial insults as well as verbal and emotional assaults at their colleges and universities. They discuss their process of navigating the expectations of the institutional culture, while staying rooted in their racial identity and culture. Furthermore, their feedback exposes ways in which institutions are only making modest efforts towards inclusion, and also describes how those efforts are often done as a reaction to issues, or to ward off detrimental perceptions of the institution. CRT seeks to expose these injustices.

Using CRT, this chapter strives to address the research questions and provide further discussion of the findings that were shared in the prior section. The chapter will go on to suggest implications for improved practice at traditionally White liberal arts colleges including specific recommendations for each of the three institutions that were sites of this research. This chapter will also voice some highlighted suggestions from the student participants and promising practices from other TWI in the Midwest region. The chapter will conclude with suggestions for future research as well as considerations and limitations of this study.

### Discussion of Findings

**How do Black students experience the campus racial climate?** The participants of the study spoke about the many ways that they experience challenges as a Black student on a traditionally White college campus. These experiences were explored from a number of different standpoints, but they exposed how the students experienced challenges with each of the dimensions of the campus racial climate (Hurtado et al., 1998) that were previously discussed. Regarding the structural dimension, students shared the challenges of being one of very few Black students on the campus in addition to their disappointment with there being so few faculty, staff, and administrators of color as well. This point is connected to the psychological environment of the campus racial climate as well. Students spoke about the uncomfortable feeling of being the only, or one of few, Black students in their class. They spoke of the pressure to speak on behalf of their racial group as well as concern about how their comments would be perceived. Additionally, participants spoke strongly of the importance of seeing Black faculty, staff, and students in positions of

influence. A lack of Black faculty and staff in prominent positions may also have a detrimental psychological impact.

Furthermore, the participants described challenges with the psychological dimension of the campus racial climate as they discussed how they believed they were perceived by peers, and also by faculty. As shared in the prior chapter, the students regularly spent time considering how they were being perceived within their campus environment, and sometimes adjusted their behavior or actions accordingly. They discussed being the target of stereotyping, such as being academically less qualified to attend college, more likely to use slang, or even an assumption of being a good dancer. Prior research confirms the negative impact of deficit-oriented stereotyping from peers and faculty, but also that which is internalized by students of color (Davis et al., 2004; Harper et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2007; Steele, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, after the election of Trump, the participants perceived a high level of racial conflict on their campuses. The students also described numerous difficulties with the behavioral dimension of the campus racial climate. They shared challenges such as experiencing racist language and frequent microaggressions. As a result, there was a growing interest from Black students to stay among students who share their identity as a protective measure due to challenges with the campus environment. Smith (2004) introduced the concept of racial battle fatigue and discussed the physiological and psychological impact of facing daily occurrences of racism on people of color on mostly White college campuses (p. 180). On at least two of the campuses in this study, North and Green, the fatigue students are facing from the challenges of their institutional environments are leading the students to retreat to safe communities of support. Consistent with prior research (Harper & Hurtado,

2007), participants of this study did not identify spaces within the campus environment that celebrated, or reflected, their racial identity outside of the Black student organizations, ethnic studies academic program, and multicultural centers.

These examples that shed light on the structural, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of the campus racial climate suggest that the participants of this study find frequent, and sustained, issues with the racial climate. Furthermore, the challenges seemed to be increasing in the Trump era. Overall, while the three institutions each profess commitments to diversity and inclusion, the racial climates of their institutions are experienced at best as status quo, and at worst unwelcoming, and at times, hostile. These challenges are frequently discussed in conversations among the Black students at the institutions. The students were tuned into the decision making of their institution's administration on these matters and the participant's described some of the ways that they tried to speak up and share their concerns with college or university leaders. Further, half of the participants (Felicia, Isabel, Joyce, Michelle, Stephanie, Betty, and Victoria) specifically discussed in the interviews that they considered transferring to a new institution at some point during College. In most cases, financial aid was the reason they did not follow through on plans to transfer; yet, the racial climate concerns were a contributing factor to their interest in transferring in every case. Given that student success and retention is of central importance to most institution's strategic goals and viability, this is an important point of consideration. The current, and growing, challenges with the racial and political climate of college campuses will need to be granted increased consideration and prioritization. Traditionally White colleges and universities are likely losing many students of color as a result of challenges with the racial climate. An unwelcoming racial

climate may cause Black students to leave of their own accord to find a better college environment, but these campus environments may also be contributing to students' inability to achieve their full potential, which has the potential to force them out of college entirely.

**How does the racial climate impact a sense of belonging?** The negative experiences with the campus racial climate shared inevitably led students to feeling as though they do not belong, at times, on the college or university campus. Participants shared their stories of hearing the N-word used by friends, seeing racist messages on social media, and even the Trump signage and support, which increased after the election, contributed to feelings that the campus is unwelcoming and unsupportive of Black students. As mentioned previously, participants in the study spoke about their experience being the "only" Black student in many classes. Certainly this was experienced by most of the student participants given the very low enrollment of Black students at their institution, however Cee's experience of not yet having a class with a Black student, even after four semesters of college, was quite surprising. Harper et al. (2011) describes this experience as "'onlyness'— the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group" (p. 190). This is a regular experience for Black students at these small, residential liberal arts colleges. The enrollments are low in general, and Black students make up three percent to six percent of the total student enrollment at these three institutions, which leads students to frequently encounter a space where they may be the only student of color or Black student. This issue is further exacerbated depending on the academic program, sports team, or activity of interest (i.e. Greek Life, theater, etc.) that the

student chooses to engage with. The participant's spoke about this experience, and the associated hardship of having very few Black faculty and staff represented at their institution. Participants also shared that the presence of Black faculty, staff, and students were even more limited in certain majors – specifically science, mathematics, and economics were referenced. The lack of faculty of color in these environments suggests to students that they do not belong in those majors and careers, or it sends a message that it may not be a safe place to learn and grow as a college student. This provides a textbook example of how racist structures embedded in higher education become cyclical if not interrogated and addressed. If Black students at selective liberal arts colleges do not see themselves represented, or their interests acknowledged, among STEM and other fields dominated by White men, then it is unlikely that they will choose to persist in those fields of study, which provides a missed opportunity to diversify fields such as medicine, engineering, or even academia.

Participants spoke about many other ways that the racial climate had a negative impact on their sense of belonging. In part, this was the result of feeling as though their racial identity, backgrounds, and race-related experiences were not important within the institution environment. Strayhorn (2012) discusses belonging as associated with and as a result of, mattering. However, for the students in this study, they frequently felt that their experience was not of interest to their peers and their culture was not worthy of celebration broadly by the institution. The opportunities for celebrating Black or African American culture or identity were rare, and generally organized by the Black student organization or multicultural center, yet even if there were opportunities available, few other students showed up to learn about or to support the efforts. The consequence is that

students often feel as though they do not fit in, or worse, feel that they are unwanted within the college community. Yet, as prior research demonstrates, a sense of belonging leads to positive educational outcomes. A sense of belonging motivates behavior (Deci et al., 1991), leads to increased effort, grades, and ultimately achievement (Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000), is particularly important for underrepresented students in college (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016), and has been shown to lead to persistence in college (Hausemann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2007). Therefore, leaders of these institutions, and other predominantly White colleges and universities, should be concerned that failing to adequately address the campus environment concerns that inhibit belonging ultimately have the potential to negatively impact outcomes for Black students.

**Where do Black students find a sense of belonging?** Despite the challenging experiences that the student participants described in navigating the campus environment and persisting in the face of difficulty with the campus racial climate, many of the participants were accomplishing good outcomes in their field of study and as student leaders, athletes, and contributors to their campus communities. They discussed the spaces for support and affirmation that they found, which contributed to their success. The majority of the participants described the importance of the Black student organizations on their campus. These organizations served as counterspaces where students could center their own reality and experience, and share stories among a community that would understand and lift them up. The Black student organizations, as with Black cultural centers described in prior research (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2006), provide an essential space for Black students to recover from the daily challenges that they face in predominantly White campus environments. The participants at both North University and

156

Green College talked at length about the importance of these organizations for their experience. Similar organizations are not present at Prairie College, however.

In addition to the Black student organizations on each campus, the participants discussed the importance of having trusted faculty and staff supporters. While few in number, the students described the support that they felt from the Black faculty and staff at their institution. They described their relationships as authentic, safe, trustworthy, caring, and talked about the special connection they had with Black faculty and staff as a result of their shared background. The Black faculty and staff on these small college campuses are providing essential spaces of belonging for Black students, regardless of whether they serve as their teacher or advisor.

At the heart of the discussion of belonging within these Midwestern liberal arts college environments is a recognition that students often need to seek out counterspaces, either through organizations or in faculty and staff offices, where they can be authentic about the challenges of their college experience and seek guidance, support, and develop the mental and physical resolve to push forward. To be very clear, this research reveals that Black people were identified as the most essential supporters of Black students at the three institutions included in this study. As mentioned, this included the Black faculty and staff who provided mentorship and support, but also the Black student organizations that are led by other Black students. The need for these supporters and spaces in order to assist Black students in navigating these White environments illuminates important considerations for traditionally White liberal arts colleges that have emerged as a result of this research. It also calls out a deficit in the functioning of these TWIs that claim to be working towards inclusion and equal access to educational opportunities.

**Contributions and Considerations from this Study**

The comparative case study methodology for this study provided the opportunity to consider the racial climate and its impact on Black students, their college experience, and their success by looking at the similarities and differences between three institutions. While it was easy to find many similarities among the three institutions, there were some interesting differences that are explored further through specific recommendations for each institution later in this chapter. Further, this project was a chance to explore the racial climate experiences of Black students at liberal arts colleges. This was also significant because there is a paucity of research on this specific institutional type. In general, much of the findings presented align with prior research from mid-sized and large universities as well as community colleges, but the unique nature of a liberal arts college seemed to magnify issues and were unexpected among Black students who anticipated supportive, inclusive, and community-orientated environments at these small, residential colleges.

Though each of the three institutions are selective in terms of enrollment, none of the institutions would be considered particularly wealthy and they remain strongly tuition revenue dependent, which is typical among liberal arts colleges outside of the most elite of this institutional type. That said, the findings of this research suggest that traditionally White liberal arts colleges should provide increased support and investment into opportunities for racial identity development for Black students. This is not only the right thing to do in that it is aligned with the institution's value claim for diversity and inclusion, but it would also contribute to improved retention and graduation rates.

These institutions are also typically located in small, mostly White communities, while Black students who choose to attend these institutions are often from large urban

areas. As a result, students can experience culture shock when transitioning into the new environment. The small enrollments of Black students at these institutions means that there are few Black people in the environment and therefore finding connections can be difficult. Black student organizations were identified by the participants as critically important spaces for community, support, affirmation, and belonging for them. In their research, McGee and Martin (2011) explore how Black students find strategies for resilience in the face of stereotypes and bias on mostly White campuses, and they found, "students responded to the stereotypes by exercising agency and achieving success" (p. 1352-1353).  The findings of my study support prior research on this point and included strategies such as staying in their room, relying on personal confidence, and seeking Black student organizations as well as trusted friends, faculty, and staff as measures to respond to racism and persist in spite of the challenges. Further, findings from this study show that having confidence in their racial identity and feeling empowered as a Black student may positively contribute to success in college. Consistent with prior research (Chavous et al., 2003, Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Smalls et al., 2007), this suggests that Black students' persistence within the traditionally White liberal arts environment is positively impacted by coming to College with a strong, positive racial identity and/or having the opportunity to develop this identity while in college. It is important to say that this finding runs counter to the original college student retention literature developed by Vincent Tinto, which recommended assimilation to institutional norms and values. Instead, this finding shows that fostering a strong Black identity in a predominantly White environment is important for persistence.  Therefore, it is recommended that liberal arts colleges make strategic investments in support of Black student organizations, Black student

mentoring/empowerment programs and opportunities, as well as in African American or ethnic studies programs. Additionally, colleges and universities should push to develop racial identity focused programs into specific academic programs, especially in STEM fields and business, economics, and finance.

Secondly, the findings of this study make clear that Black faculty and staff are critically important to the success of Black students in the traditionally White liberal arts college environment. Hurtado's (1992) research demonstrated that investments in the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty was an area where small, private institutions faltered behind large institutions in terms of creating positive racial climates for students of color. A more recent report in the *Times Higher Education* states that private liberal arts colleges continue to lag behind other private institutions of higher education in faculty diversity (Bothwell, 2017). Yet, over and over again, the participants of this study identified the crucial support that Black faculty and staff provided to them and this was, by far, the request and recommendation most frequently raised in the interviews. Nearly every one of the fourteen participants made this recommendation. Therefore, it is apparent that one of the most deliberate ways traditionally White liberal arts colleges could demonstrate a commitment to supporting Black students, and working to foster a sense of belonging, would be to increase the ethnic diversity of faculty and staff through strategic planning and investment in recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts. This includes attending to the challenges, and racial battle fatigue, of Black faculty and staff as well as recognizing the important service that they are providing to Black students, which may not be currently recognized as part of promotion and tenure decisions.

Lastly, this research furthers a call by critical race theory scholars for increased attention in research, policy, and practice on the mental health needs of students of color in predominantly White colleges and universities (McGee & Stovall, 2015). At each of the three institutions, student participants identified the fatigue and frustration that they experienced as a result of being a Black student in a mostly White college environment. While some student participants found adequate means for coping through the support provided by Black student organizations, trusted faculty and staff, and support from family or friends, many identified the need for increased support from campus counseling services. Traditionally White liberal arts colleges need to redouble efforts to respond to the significant mental fatigue of Black students and invest in culturally-responsive mental health services on-campus.

The students at North University spoke very specifically about the support that was provided to many of them by one particular counselor who shared their racial identity. This counselor, though no longer employed by the institution, was the most frequently cited support person and advocate for the Black women from North who participated in the study. Now that she was gone, the students were very concerned about how they would find support for their mental health concerns. While at North, students were eager to seek services from a counselor of color who they found to be responsive to their challenges and experiences, some colleges and universities need to find new ways to engage, and be responsive, to the needs of students of color who are sometimes less likely to seek out counseling services. Boone et al. (2011) discussed ways to reconsider the role of counseling services on college campuses in an effort to engage traditionally "hard to reach" populations of students including students of color and international students. They

161

suggest "an alternative role for professional counselors, called student support, which focuses on problem solving, accessing resources, and advocacy. The student support role is distinct from the role of a traditional counselor in that it involves acting on the student's environment with the intention of relieving stressors that may lead to depression or academic problems" (p. 197). Further, they suggest engaging students of color outside of the counseling center and instead meeting students in more comfortable spaces for them including in the campus multicultural center (Boone et al., 2011). As college students across the United States have increased advocacy for campus responsiveness to the needs of Black students, the call for counselors of color and improved mental health services has frequently been raised as a demand. Therefore, this recommendation from this research study is not novel, but does provide additional evidence that has already been called for by Black college students nationwide. However, it is critical that if institutions of higher education are to invest more specifically in mental health services, they must also have a very clear understanding of the needs of students of color. McGee and Stovall (2015) recommend using CRT to "understand and implement racially appropriate healing systems for Black college students and other groups that are chronically underserved and understudied" (p. 508). To be sure, moving forward with expanding traditional modes of mental health services on college campuses without involvement and insight from Black students may work against the goal of increasing Black student engagement if efforts are not deemed to responsive to the real needs.

It is important to point out that the recommendations that have been made here are necessary to the degree that institutions of higher education are unable to fully and adequately challenge the culture of whiteness and interrupt the racism that continues to

162

permeate the environments of colleges and universities. True progress would make the additional mental health services for Black students or more investments in Black student organizations no longer necessary. However, since racism is considered to be a permanent fixture of U.S. society (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006), and therefore institutions of education, then these are important considerations that have the potential to improve the experience of Black students while in college as well as support increased persistence to graduation.

I must acknowledge the fear that I have in the discussion of findings and considerations that I have shared. I worry that simply investing in a few quick fixes that may help Black students "get through" at a predominantly White college may assist students for the time being and will aid institutions working to increase their retention and graduation rates; however, it lets institutions off the hook without making truly meaningful changes that are the key to countering the culture of Whiteness within academia and living up to the values claim of equal access and inclusion that are prevalent among liberal arts colleges. If institutions are genuinely going to disrupt and dismantle the dominant narrative, they will not only need to listen to the stories of Black students as well as other minoritized groups on-campus and provide appropriate responses, but they will also need to begin the real work of interrogating the ways in which the institution, including campus leaders, perpetuate policies and practices that maintain White values, norms, and power. Doing this work involves engaging in what Yamamoto (1997) called for in legal studies with is discussion of critical race praxis, which involves taking what is known about racism and oppression and incorporating that with anti-racist practice. Stovall (2004) discusses the work of critical race praxis in education, "[i]t's one thing to know and analyze the

163

functions of race. It is yet another to engage in the practice of developing and maintaining a school with an anti-oppressive, anti-racist agenda…" (p. 10). This praxis will involve higher education leaders investing deeply in understanding the experiences of students of color on-campus and then using this experiential knowledge of students to enact inclusive policies, practices, and solutions to improve outcomes.

## Participant Recommendations

In the interviews, I invited participants to offer recommendations or suggestions, which might contribute to improving their College experiences.

- "I don't necessarily know that there's one thing that I would be like 'yes, do this and I will feel more at home', you know?  But, just like the presence of more Black and Brown bodies would be nice." – Stephanie
- "I wish there were more Black faculty members." - Natalie
- "More diverse professors, who can relate to our experience. For other students that come after me, I want them to have the ability to see themselves represented in leadership." - Christopher
- "We need more academic support programs and more mentoring programs." –Betty
- "More Black faculty and staff would be really, really good." - Dante
- "I think freshmen studies teachers need some type of diversity training or something to help them deal with these racial topics that are being discussed in the classrooms."  - Joyce
- "I think that they need to start hiring administration and faculty of color, specifically Black faculty and administrators." – Joyce

164

- "We need another counselor of color at the counseling center. Also having the professors go through some kind of mental health training." - Michelle
- "I think the school does a good job providing, but I don't know how good they do at supporting or nurturing. I don't know if this is a very nurturing environment, it's kind of like a mom who puts food in the fridge but won't cook for you." – Nick

## Specific Recommendations for Each Institution

### North University

- There is a significant lack of trust, and feelings of safety, by Black students that needs urgent attention. Invest in intergroup dialogue opportunities to work to foster understanding between groups of students.
- Attend to trust issues between students and administration as well. Administrators should work to build collaborative relationships with Black students and their organizations.
- Invest quickly in counseling services support that is culturally responsive and trusted by students. This may be the most urgent and necessary investment for North University.
- Invest in faculty recruitment for diversity. In particular, investments are needed in the sciences, mathematics, and economics.
- Provide opportunities for faculty to learn how to develop culturally responsive teaching practices and to manage discussions on controversial topics in the classroom.

**Green College**

- Conduct an internal assessment to determine how diversity and inclusion is "sold" in the admissions process, but then not felt from the student experience on campus. Then, the College should make plans to address these discrepancies to achieve integrity.

- While maintaining investment in the multicultural office, make diversity and inclusion efforts the responsibility of all campus departments, entities, and roles. Build these efforts in to institutional strategic planning.

- Develop measures to alleviate the burden felt by Black faculty in supporting Black students. This includes investing in the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff of color, but also in developing trustworthy and culturally competent faculty and staff across campus.

- Further invest human and monetary resources in mentoring programs and empowerment groups to support Black students. These programs are effective on this campus, but should be resourced well enough to expand to meet the needs of more students with specific consideration to intersecting identities.

**Prairie College**

- Investment in diversity and inclusion efforts are needed on many fronts. The institution should develop a plan for strategic investments over the next several years. This plan should include investments in the following areas:
  - Hire at least one staff member with focused responsibilities to support students of color and other traditionally underrepresented and/or underserved student groups at the institution.

166

- o Black students would likely benefit from the development of a Black student organization or an empowerment/mentoring program. Black students have few/no opportunities to develop their racial identity at Prairie College. It is possible that this is contributing to student departure, student's feeling unsafe to share their experience with the racial climate, a lack of interest in diversity programs, and research suggests it negatively impacts academic outcomes. Initially, faculty and staff may need to introduce, and work to grow, such programs.

- o Invest in the recruitment of faculty and staff of color. This is lacking and would benefit not only students of color/Black students, but all students (Madyun, Williams, McGee, & Milner, 2015)

- o Invest in growing the enrollment of students of color generally, and Black students in particular. In doing so, recognize that retention concerns will then necessitate developing the cultural competency skills of faculty and staff as well as developing the engagement opportunities for students of color.

### Limitations and Boundaries of the Study

The findings and discussion of this study offer expanded insight in to the experiences of Black college students at traditionally White liberal arts colleges in the Midwest with the hope that the research outcomes can be used to improve the campus environments. However, it is important to understand both the boundaries of this study, and the limitations.

This study focused heavily on the perceptions by the participants of the campus environment, including the programs, services, opportunities, as well as perceptions of

167

peers, faculty, and staff. I did not attempt to investigate the perspectives and voices of

campus administrators or faculty to further understand their views on efforts,

opportunities, or even reasons for resource limitations or deficiencies. Furthermore, the

voices of students were centered and prioritized in this research, therefore analysis of

institutionally conducted climate evaluations, committee minutes, and/or nationally

normed survey data was not included with the findings, which presents a possible

limitation in the depth of information available about the campus context.

Additionally, the study included a small sample size of fourteen students at three

campuses. While studying the phenomenon using qualitative methods at three distinct

institutions does add a unique feature as compared to prior research, the findings are still

very specific and offer insight into the experiences of Black students in this particular

institutional context in the Midwest. The profile of each institution may assist others in

determining whether findings may be transferable to other institutions, but findings should

not be assumed to be generalizable to other contexts. Also, there were some differences in

the number and age of students who engaged with this research. At Green College, all six

participants were senior level students, while at North University, the participants were

sophomore and junior level students. These differences in grade levels likely influence the

perspectives shared.

Finally, my identity as a White, female researcher may have influenced the findings.

While I worked to build good rapport with the student participants and establish a sense of

security regarding the process and outcomes, there may have been limitations to their

openness with me in the interviews given the identities that I hold and their perception of

me. That said, I sensed that the participants were eager to have the chance to tell their

stories. In some cases, they acknowledged that it was cathartic to share experiences that they have often held inside, or only shared with friends and family, before engaging with the study. It is my hope that the findings, as shared, honors their perspective and adequately advocates for improvements and positive change in the future.

## Implications for Research

There are a number of recommendations and implications for future research that stem from the findings of this study. In particular, I recommend that more research on the experience of Black students, and other traditionally underrepresented or underserved communities, be conducted in small, residential liberal arts college environments. There is very limited literature available on these institutional contexts and while findings from this study suggest similarities to research findings at larger institutions, there are nuances regarding the small college that need to be understood. Furthermore, advocacy for institutional change within small colleges would be enhanced with more information on these institutional contexts as campus leaders and decision makers rely heavily on comparisons between similarly typed institutions and are unlikely to see the existing comparisons with large, research universities as helpful or worthwhile for comparison.

Additionally, future research on campus racial climate and Black student experiences should incorporate socioeconomic status as well as the diversity of the home and high school environment as added variables for understanding the transition to college, the perception of the racial climate, sense of belonging, as well as college success. Furthermore, I recommend incorporating racial identity models and scales, such as the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), into the research design for studies of campus racial climate in an effort to better understand how racial identity may inform

student experiences with the campus environment as well as student responses to challenges and the contributions to persistence. And, though this research was intended to identify factors that contributed or fostered success in college among Black students at TWI, it might be interesting to explore the racial climate experiences of Black students who chose to leave the college or university.

Finally, future research should dive more fully into understanding counterspaces and healing spaces for Black students at traditionally White colleges and universities. This research identified these spaces as important for student affirmation, belonging, and to bolster resilience despite bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. Better understanding of how to develop and support these critical spaces would be especially instructive.

## Promising Practices at Traditionally White Institutions

When considering the liberal arts colleges that are most successful in graduating students, particularly Black students and other underrepresented student communities, discussions often point out the same institutions that are also ranked highest overall for this institutional type. These high rankings include institutions with excellent outcomes, but also institutional endowments between one and two billion dollars. For example, a *Money* magazine article ranks "The 50 Best Colleges for African Americans in One Handy Chart" (Clark, 2016). Their ranking incorporates Black student enrollment, Black student graduation rates, affordability, and future earnings potential. Another similar article by *The New York Times* (2017) outlines the colleges "doing the most" for low-income students. In these two reports, elite and wealthy institutions such as Amherst College, Pomona College, Wellesley College, Williams College, and Vassar College are high on the list.

Despite the good efforts of the top and most-wealthy liberal arts colleges, there are two Midwestern liberal arts colleges that are working to implement innovative and strategic initiatives to improve their campus environments for students of color and other underrepresented student communities. Beloit College located in southern Wisconsin is one such institution. Beloit enrolls 1,300 students and has an endowment of approximately $130 million (The Education Trust, n.d.), which is more than Green College and Prairie College, but about half of the endowment of North University. Five percent of Beloit's students identify as Black or African-American (The Education Trust, n.d.) and six percent of faculty are Black or African American (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2017). The percentage of Black faculty is higher than the three institutions that provide the cases for this study. Furthermore, the graduation rates of Black students (The Education Trust, n.d.) at Beloit are higher, and generally more stable over time, than the three institutions involved with this study.

Table 3

*Beloit College Graduation Rates by Ethnicity*

|  | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 | 2010 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 80% | 78% | 78% | 76% | 77% |
| **Black students** | **90%** | **70%** | **75%** | **64%** | **75%** |
| Asian students | NA | 46% | NA | 67% | 73% |
| Latino students | 95% | 90% | 79% | 50% | 80% |
| White students | 93% | 80% | 79% | 77% | 78% |
| Underrepresented minority | 94% | 79% | 77% | 61% | 75% |

Note: NA is used in cases where the data was not available.

In the past several years, Beloit has been aggressively working to create a more inclusive living and learning community. Beginning during the 2013-14 academic year, Beloit College brought the Sustained Dialogue program to their campus in order to increase intercultural literacy among their student, faculty, and staff community and seek to foster

an environment where genuine interaction, through dialogue, is a central component of

campus life (Beloit College, n.d. a). This effort brought together both the Provost's Office

and the Division of Student Affairs and demonstrates an interest in inclusive practice inside

and outside of the classroom. Since that time, the institution has furthered their efforts.

During the 2015-16 academic year, a new Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusiveness

(OADI) was launched with the aim to

> dismantle the structural barriers in place that prohibit the attainment of our college
> mission for underserved and underrepresented students. OADI reimagines how
> diversity operates by using an equity asset-based framework. This entails reforming
> institutional structures and practices to position underrepresented bodies and their
> assets (lived experiences, skills, and mindsets) at the center (Beloit College, n.d. b).

The OADI leads two U.S. Department of Education TRIO programs, a graduate school

exploration fellowship, and a Mellon-funded Decolonizing Pedagogies Project. OADI

identifies their priorities as efforts to foster belonging, thriving, and improved retention for

the students served by the various programs of the Office.

Beloit College is also demonstrating their commitment through a set of senior staff

goals for an inclusive living and learning community. Senior staff members from all areas of

the institution provide oversight for these goals which include focus on: belonging and

thriving; asset-based student development; sustained dialogue; employee hiring and

retention; employee development; gender violence and discrimination; students with

disabilities; LGBTQ support; improved communications; and the development of a

presidential advisory council on these issues (Beloit College, 2016). Beloit's efforts are

noteworthy because the demonstrate a number of promising practices. First, the efforts are

not collected in the hands of the multicultural office exclusively. Responsibility for progress

has been spread broadly among campus departments and efforts are collaborative between

departments. Secondly, the institution is articulating efforts to train faculty and staff and develop students from asset-based framework and by valuing diverse approaches knowledge production. The articulation of this philosophy and value are notable, and sets Beloit apart from the articulated plans and efforts of other Midwestern liberal arts colleges. Finally, the discussions of belonging and thriving incorporate direct discussions of supporting self-care and healing as a part of student success at Beloit College.

DePauw University is another liberal arts college that is demonstrating promising efforts towards fostering belonging for their students. DePauw, which enrolls 2,200 students is located in Greencastle, Indiana, a mostly White population of 10,000 residents. More than six percent of DePauw University students identify as Black or African American (The Education Trust, n.d.) and six percent of the faculty identify as Black or African American (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2017). The institution has a larger endowment of $627 million. The graduation rates of DePauw students are included below and demonstrate some gaps between outcomes for students of differing racial/ethnic background (The Education Trust, n.d.).

Table 4

*DePauw University Graduation Rates by Ethnicity*

|  | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 | 2010 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All students | 80% | 80% | 78% | 85% | 86% |
| **Black students** | **89%** | **73%** | **53%** | **79%** | **64%** |
| Asian students | 92% | 80% | 78% | 100% | 81% |
| Latino students | 75% | 40% | 68% | 85% | 71% |
| White students | 79% | 82% | 81% | 86% | 87% |
| Underrepresented minority | 77% | 64% | 59% | 80% | 67% |

Note: NA is used in cases where the data was not available.

DePauw University recently embarked on a five-year campus plan for diversity and inclusion, which states, "DePauw's vision for diversity and inclusion aims to create a

campus that encourages examination and dismantling of the historical, systemic and social barriers that inhibit inclusion and which respects and values the contribution of each person's unique and multifaceted identity to the DePauw community" (DePauw University, n.d., p.1). The plan incorporates efforts to increase the recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students of color. It also calls for progress in developing a more robust set of courses focused on critical understanding of issues of power, oppression, and global issues. The institution also calls out the need to progress in diversifying the enrollment of the Honors program as well as the need for enhanced professional development for faculty and staff in order to better equip them to serve the needs of a diverse student community. One of the most significant efforts of DePauw University, however, is the current construction and development of a new Center for Diversity and Inclusion, which provides a new building and a centralized gathering and programming space for the previously decentralized spaces dedicated to the Black student union, the cultural resource center, and the multicultural office space. The development of the new Center was made possible, in part, by the donation by DePauw graduates, will complement the University's plan for diversity and inclusion, and will "assist in fostering a safe and affirming campus climate for all students" (DePauw University, 2017).

While these two institutions are not free of campus racial climate challenges, their efforts demonstrate commitment to increasing the recruitment and retention of faculty of color, developing institutional efforts for improved teaching practices for diverse students, as well as the development of opportunities and spaces of belonging, healing, and empowerment for Black students. These promising practices at Beloit College and DePauw University have the potential to improve the experiences and outcomes of their Black

students and align with the recommendations put forth as a result of the findings of this study. Furthermore, they show that intentional efforts on the part of campus leaders can lead to innovative, collaborative, and impactful outcomes for students when diversity and inclusion is built into strategic planning and institutional budgets.

## My Learning

I said in describing the development and design of this study that I had a stake in the outcome of the research. My professional role has direct responsibility for supporting students of color and fostering student success, defined as improving student retention and graduation. Therefore, and especially as a White person with these responsibilities, this research must be used to improve my practice in addition to informing the practice of administrators and faculty at liberal arts colleges and other traditionally White institutions. One of the primary takeaways for my own professional practice is that I need to do a better job of asking for, and truly hearing, the feedback of Black students on my campus regarding campus programs and services. Then, it is essential to involve these same students in developing solutions and institutional responses to the stated needs. I have heard students on my campus call for more faculty and staff of color to be hired and I have heard students of color request responsiveness to the racial trauma that they are currently experiencing on and off of our campus due to the current political climate. For example, if students of color tell me that microaggressions are negatively impacting their experience or their perception safety and belonging at the College, then I need to do what I can to affirm that concern and also respond to that concern. Too often college and university administrators and faculty brush off these complaints as "real world" issues that we need to help students learn to navigate citing that the "liberal bubble" of college and university environments

cannot be their safe haven forever. I have likely been such an administrator who has not fully understood the impact of these persistent, negative experiences. Yet, this research further confirms that experiences with microaggressions, and other racist acts, that Black students experience in TWI environments has a strong, negative impact on belonging, academic outcomes, and persistence to graduation; and therefore, I have an obligation to validate these concerns, work to reduce the impact, and where possible, identify ways to eliminate them altogether. Consistent with CRT, if through this research I hope to work to expose the barriers to social justice in higher education, and work to eliminate oppression, then I must also be cognizant of the ways my practice is complicit and make adjustments accordingly.

## Conclusion

I feel fortunate to have had the chance to learn from the students who participated in this study. It is their voices shared through the findings that need to be considered and used as a catalyst for change. They were impressive students who held leadership positions on their campuses and were committed to doing the hard work to achieve their career and other future goals. They were athletes, artists, and scholars, and were committed to bettering their campus for the students who would follow behind them. As they shared their stories, I learned that they were experiencing college success, but not without the need to navigate relatively persistent racial challenges within their campus environment. However, each student was moving forward and along the way as they encountered difficulties, they employed strategies for success that included confidence, empowerment, and reliance on the support of trusted friends, family, mentors, and advisors.

Traditionally White liberal arts colleges need to consider if what they are offering to Black students who enroll at their institutions is truly fair and equitable as compared to what White students in the same environment experience. This research demonstrates that the negative encounters with the campus racial climate may likely interfere with Black students' sense of belonging, their academic outcomes, and ultimately their persistence towards achieving a college degree and seeking post-college opportunities. This negatively impacts outcomes for students, but it also negatively impacts outcomes for the institution. In the name of inclusion, and in an effort to accomplish the institutional mission and goals, campus leaders must work to develop resources and strategies that will enhance Black student's success in college including investing in faculty diversity, Black student mentoring and empowerment programs, and culturally-responsive mental health services. Black students across the United States are being very clear with college and university leaders regarding their desire, and at times, demands, for these resources. It is time for traditionally White institutions to listen to these voices, and invest necessary resources in order to support improved campus experiences and academic outcomes for Black students.

**REFERENCES**

Allen, W. (1992). The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review*, *62*(1), 26-45.

Ancis, J.R., Sedlacek, W.E., & Mohr, J.J. (2000). Student perceptions of campus climate by race. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 78*(2), 180-185.

Astin, A.W. (1999) How the liberal arts affects students. *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academic of Arts and Sciences, 123*(1), 77-100.

Baum, S. (2010, August 22). As students change, colleges must follow. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/Student-Demographics-As/123919/.

Baumeister, R.F. & Leary, M.R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachment as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*, 497 – 529.

Beloit College (n.d.). Sustained Dialogue Update August 2014. Retrieved from https://www.beloit.edu/inclusive/sd/more_about_SD/update/.

Beloit College (n.d.). Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusiveness Charge. Retrieved from https://www.beloit.edu/oadi/charge/.

Beloit College (2016, October 16). Senior staff inclusive living and learning goals. Retrieved from https://www.beloit.edu/priorities/inclusive/senior-staff-goals/.

Berger, J.B. & Milem, J.F. (2000). Promoting undergraduate self-concept: Differences between historically Black and predominantly White colleges, *Journal of College Student Development, 41* (4), 381-394.

Bergerson (2003). Critical race theory and white racism: Is there room for white scholars in fighting racism in education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(1), 51-63.

Boone at al. (2011). Let's Talk: Getting out of the counseling center to serve hard-to-reach students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *39*(4), 194-205.

Bothwell, E. (2017, January 12). US liberal arts colleges 'less diverse' than other private universities. *Times Higher Education.* Retrieved from https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/us-liberal-arts-colleges-less-diverse-other-private-universities.

Bowen, W. G., & Bok, D. (1998). *The shape of the river: Long-term consequences of*

*considering race in college and university Aamissions*. Ewing, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Braxton, J.M. (2000). Introduction. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 1-10). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Braxton, J.M. & Lieu, L.A. (2000). The viability of academic integration as a central construct in Tinto's interactionalist theory of college student departure. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 11-28). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Carspecken, P. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide.* London: Routledge.

Carter, P.L. (2006). Straddling boundaries: Identity, culture, and school. *Sociology of Education, 79,* 304-328.

Clark, K. (2016, April 12). The 50 best colleges for African Americans in one handy chart. *Money Magazine*. Retrieved from http://time.com/money/4282172/best-collegesafrican-americans/.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review 43*(6), 1241-1299.

Chavous, T. M., Bernat, D. H., Schmeelk-Cone, K., Caldwell, C. H., Kohn-Wood, L., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2003).Racial identity and academic attainment among African American adolescents. *Child Development, 74*, 1076–1090.

Chavous, T.M. (2005). An intergroup contact-theory framework for evaluating racial climate on predominantly White college campuses. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 36*, 239-257.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches(2nd Ed.).* Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ:  Pearson.

Davis, M., Dias-Bowie, Y., Greenberg, K., Klukken, G., Pollio, H.R., Thomas, S.P., & Thompson, C.L. (2004). "A fly in the buttermilk": Descriptions of university life by successful

Black undergraduate students at a predominantly white southeastern university. *The Journal of Higher Education, 75*(4), 420-445.

Deci, E.L., Vallerand, R.J., Pelletier, L.G., & Ryan, R.M. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational Psychologist, 25*(3/4), 325-346.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction.* New York: New York University Press.

Delgado Bernal, D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 105-126.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2005). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

DePauw University (2017, November 16). Justin and Darriane Christian Center for Diversity and Inclusion opens during Monon Bell weekend. Retrieved from https://www.depauw.edu/news-media/latest-news/details/33380/

DePauw University (n.d.). Building an inclusive community: DePauw University campus plan 2016-2021. Retrieved from https://www.depauw.edu/files/resources/2016-21diversityandinclusionplan.pdf.

Durkheim, E. (1961). *Suicide.* Glencoe: The Free Press.

Engle, J. & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first generation students*. Published by The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. Retreived from http://www.pellinstitute.org/publications-Moving_Beyond_Access_2008.shtml.

Foley, D. & Valenzuela, A. (2005). Critical ethnography: The politics of collaboration. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J.H. (2005). The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Fries-Britt, S. & Turner, B. (2002). Uneven stories: Successful Black collegians at a Black and White campus. *The Review of Higher Education.* 25(3), 315-330.

Gasman, M., Baez, B., Drezner, N.D., Sedgewick, K.V., Tudico, C., & Schmid, J.M. (2007). Historically black colleges and universities: Recent trends. *Academe, 93*(1), 69-77.

Goodenow, C. (1992). Strengthening the links between educational psychology and the study of social contexts. *Educational Psychologist, 27*(2), 177-196.

Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationships to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 13*(1), 21-43.

Gomes, P.J. (1999). Affirmation and adaptation: Values and the elite residential college. *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academic of Arts and Sciences, 123*(1), 101-120.

Gordon, J. (2005). White on white: Researcher reflexivity and the logics of privilege in white schools undertaking reform. *The Urban Review, 37*(4), 279-302.

Graubard, S. R. (1999). Preface. *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academic of Arts and Sciences, 123*(1), V-XIV.

Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Guiffrida, D.A. (2003). African American student organizations as agents of social integration. I*Journal of College Student Development, 44*(3), 304-319.

Guiffrida, D.A. (2006). Toward a cultural advancement of Tinto's theory. *The Review of Higher Education, 29*(4). 451 – 472.

Guiffrida, D.A., Kiyama, J.M., Waterman, S.J., & Museus, S.D. (2012). Moving from cultures of individualism to cultures of collectivism in support of students of color. In S.D. Museus & U.M Jayakumar (Eds.). *Creating campus cultures: Fostering success among racially diverse student populations* (pp. 68-87). New York: Routledge.

Gurin, P. (1999). Expert report of Patricia Gurin. *Gratz, et al. v. Bollinger, et al*, (97-75321).

Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, *72*(3), 330-367.

Harper, S.R., Davis, R.J., Jones, D.E., McGowan, B.L., Ingram, T.N., and Platt, C. S. (2011) Race and racism in the experiences of black male resident assistants at predominantly white universities. Journal of College Student Development, 52(2), 180-200.

Harper, S.R. & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services, 120*, 7-24.

Harper, S. R., Patton, L. D., & Wooden, O. S. (2009). Access and equity for African American students in higher education: A critical race historical analysis of policy efforts.

*Journal of Higher Education, 80*(4), 389-414.

Harper, S.R. and Quaye, S.J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for Black identity
expression and development among African American male student leaders.
*Journal of College Student Development, 48*(2), 127-144.

Harris, C. (1995). Whiteness as property. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, & Thomas,
K. (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement.* (pp. 276
291). New York: The New Press.

Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a
predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year
college students. *Research in Higher Education, 48* (7), 803–839.

Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2002). Investigating "sense
of belonging" in first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention,
4* (3), 227–256.

hooks, b. (1989) Talking back: thinking feminist. *Thinking Black*. Boston, MA: South
End Press

Howe, K. R., & Eisenhardt, M. (1990). Standards for qualitative (and quantitative) research:
A prolegomenon. *Educational Researcher, 19*(4), 2 - 9.

Hurtado, S. (1992). The campus racial climate: Contexts of conflict. *The Journal of Higher
Education, 63*(5), 539-569.

Hurtado, S., Alvarado, A.R., & Guillermo-Wann, C. (2015). Creating inclusive environments:
The mediating effect of faculty and staff validation on the relationship of
discrimination/bias to students' sense of belonging. *Journal Committed to Social
Change on Race and Ethnicity, 1*, 60-81.

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of
the campus racial climate on Latina/o college students' sense of belonging.
*Sociology of Education, 70*, 324–345.

Hurtado, S., Milem, J.F., Clayton-Pedersen, A.R., & Allen, W.R. (1998). Enhancing campus
climates for racial/ethnic diversity: Educational policy and practice. *Review of
Higher Education, 21*(3), 281 - 297.

Jay, M. (2003). Critical race theory, multicultural education, and the hidden
curriculum of hegemony. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 5(4), 3-9.

Jayakumar, U.M. Museus, S. D. (2012). Mapping the intersection of campus cultures and

equitable outcomes among racially diverse student populations. In S.D. Museus & U.M Jayakumar (Eds.). *Creating campus cultures: Fostering success among racially diverse student populations* (pp. 1-27). New York: Routledge.

Jones, S. R. (2008). Constructing identities at the intersections: An autoethnographic exploration of multiple dimension of identity. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(3), 287-304.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2006*). What matters to student success: A review of the literature.* Commissioned report for the National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success: Spearheading a Dialog on Student Success. Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative.

Kuh, G. D., & Love, P. G. (2000). A cultural perspective on student departure. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 196–212). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47–68.

LeCompte, M. D., Preissle, J., & Tesch, R. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research.* New York: Academic Press.

Leonardo, Z. (2012). *Race frameworks: A multidimensional theory of racism and education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Lewis, A.E., (2001). There is no "race" in the schoolyard: Color-blind ideology in an (almost) all-White school. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 781-811.

Locks, A.M., Hurtado, S., Bowman, N.A., & Oseguera, L. (2008). Extending notions of campus climate and diversity to students' transition to college. *The Review of Higher Education*, *31*(3), 257-285.

Loo, C.M. & Rolison, G. (1986). Alienation of ethnic minority students at a predominantly white university. *Journal of Higher Education 57*(1), 58-77.

Madison, D.S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Madyun, N., Williams, S., McGee, E.O., & Milner, H.R. (2015). On the importance of African American faculty in higher education: Implications and recommendations. *Journal of Educational Foundations, 27*(3-4), 65-84.

Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.

McClelland, K.E. and Auster, C.T. (1990). Public platitudes and hidden tensions: Racial climates at predominantly White liberal arts colleges. *Journal of Higher Education, 61*(6), 607 – 642.

McGee, E.O. & Martin, D.B. (2011). "You would not believe what I have to go through to prove my intellectual value!" Stereotype management among academically successful black mathematics and engineering students. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48*(6), 1347-1389.

McGee, E. O. & Stovall, D. (2015). Reimagining critical race theory in education: Mental health, healing, and the pathway to liberatory praxis. *Educational Theory*, *65*(5),491-511

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from case study Research in education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Milem, J. F., Chang, M. J., & Antonio, A. L. (2005*). Making diversity work on campus: A research-based perspective.* Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publishing.

Milner, H.R. (2007) Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher, 36*(7), 388-400.

Museus, S.D. (2014). The culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model: A new theory of college success among racially diverse student populations. In M.B. Paulsen (Ed.) *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 189-225). New York: Springer.

Museus, S.D. & Griffin, K.A. (2011). Mapping the margins in higher education: On the promise of intersectionality frameworks in research and discourse. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 151*, 5-13.

Museus, S.D., Nichols, A.H., & Lambert, A. (2008). Racial differences in the effects of campus racial climate on degree completion: A structural model. *Review of Higher Education, 33*(1), 67-94.

Museus, S.D. & Quaye, S.J. (2009). Toward and intercultural perspective or racial and ethnic minority college student persistence. *The Review of Higher Education, 33*(1), 67-94.

Museus, S.D., Ravello, J.N., & Vega, B.E., (2012). The campus racial culture: A critical race counterstory. In S.D. Museus & U.M Jayakumar (Eds.). *Creating campus cultures: Fostering success among racially diverse student populations* (pp. 28-45). New York: Routledge.

Nichols, A.H. & Evans-Bell, D. (2017). A look at black student success: Identifying top- and bottom-performing institutions. Published by The Education Trust. Retrieved from https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/A-Look-at-Black-Student-Success.pdf.

Nora, A. & Cabrera, A.F. (1996). The role of perceptions of prejudice on the adjustment of minority students to college. *The Journal of Higher Education, 67*(2), 119-148.

Osterman, K.F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(3), 323-367.

Ostrove, J.M. & Long, S.M. (2007). Social class and belonging: Implications for college adjustment. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30(4), 363-389.

Palmer, R., & Young, E. (2010). The uniqueness of an HBCU environment: How a supportive campus climate promotes student success. *The evolving challenges facing Black college students: New insights for practice and research*, 138-161.

Patton, L. D. (2006). The voice of reason: A qualitative examination of Black student perceptions of the Black culture center. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(6), 628-646.

Patton, L.D.& Simmons, S (2008). Exploring complexities of multiple identities of lesbians in a black college environment. Negro Educational Review, 59(3-4),197-215.

Patton, MQ. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (2nd Edition).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pike, G.R. & Kuh, G.D. (2006). Relationships among structural diversity, informal peer interactions and perceptions of peer interactions. *The Review of Higher Education 29*(4), 425-450.

Rankin, S.R. & Reason, R.D. (2005). Differing perspectives: How students of color and White students perceive campus climate for underrepresented groups. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(1), 43-61.

Rendon, L.I., Jalomo, R.E., & Nora, A. (2000). Theoretical considerations in the study of minority student retention in higher education. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 196–212). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Rossman, G.B. & Rallis, S.F. (2012). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rowley, S.M., Sellers, R.M., Chavous, T.M., Smith, M.A. (1998). The relationship between

racial identity and self-esteem in African American college and high school students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*(3), 715-724.

Saenz, V.B., Ngai, H.N., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Factors influencing positive interactions across race for African American, Asian American, Latino, and White college students*. Research in Higher Education, 48*(1), 1-38.

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Sedlacek, W.E. (1999). Black students on White campuses: 20 years of research. In *Journal of College Student Development, 40*(5), 538-550.

Sellers, R. M., Chavous, T. M., & Cooke, D. Y. (1998). Racial ideology and racial centrality as predictors of African American college students' academic performance. *Journal of Black Psychology, 24*, 8-27.

Sellers, R.M., Smith, M.A., Shelton, J.N., Rowley, S.A.J. & Chavous, T.M. (1998). Multidimensional model of racial identity: A reconceptualization of African American racial identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 2, 18-39.

Sleeter, C. E. (1996). White silence and white solidarity. In N. Ignatiev & J. Garvey (Eds.) *Race Traitor* (257-265). New York: Routledge.

Sleeter, C.E. (1993). Advancing a white discourse: A response to Scheurich. *Educational Researcher, 22*(8), 13 –15.

Smalls, C., White, R., Chavous, T.M., & Sellers, R.M. (2007). Racial ideological beliefs and racial discrimination experiences as predictors of academic engagement among African-American adolescents. *Journal of Black Psychology, 33*, 299-330.

Smith, W.A., Yosso, T.J., & Solórzano, D.S. (2007). Racial primes and black misandry on historically White campuses: Toward critical race accountability in educational administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43*(5), 559-585.

Solórzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *The Journal of Negro Education, 69*(1/2), 60 – 73.

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001). Critical race theory and LatCrit theory and method: Counterstorytelling Chicana and Chicano graduate school experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 4,* 471-494.

Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). A critical race theory counterstory of race, racism, and Affirmative Action. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 35*(2), 155-168.

Stake, R.E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R.E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis.* New York: The Guilford Press

Steele, C.M. (2002). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *In Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education*, *2nd Ed.* Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.

Strayhorn, T.L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students.* New York: Routledge.

Strayhorn, T. L., Blakewood, A. M., & DeVita, J. M. (2008). Factors affecting the college choice of African American gay male undergraduates: Implications for retention. *NASAP Journal*, 11(1), 88-108.

Stovall, D.O. (2004). School leader as negotiator: Critical race theory, praxis, and the creation of productive space. *Multicultural Education, 12*(2), 8-12.

Tate, W. F. (1997). Critical race theory and education: History, theory, and implications. *Review of Research in Education, 22*, 195–247.

Tatum, B.D. (2003). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* New York: Basic Books.

The Chronicle of Higher Education (2017, June 12). Race, ethnicity, and gender of full-time faculty at more than 3,700 institutions. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/faculty-diversity.

The Education Trust (n.d.). College Results Online. Retrieved from http://www.collegeresults.org.

The New York Times (2017, May 25). *Top colleges doing the most for the American dream.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/05/25/sunday-review/opinion-pell-table.html.

Thelin, J.R. (2004). *A history of American higher education.* The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, MD.

Tierney, W. G. (1999). Models of minority college-going and retention: Cultural integrity versus cultural suicide. *The Journal of Negro Education, 68*(1), 80–91.

Tierney, W.G. (2000). Power, identity, and the dilemma of college student departure. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle.* (pp. 213–234). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45*, 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of retention: What's next? *Journal of College Student Retention, 8*(1), 1 – 19.

Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vaccaro, A. & Newman, B. M. (2016). Development of a sense of belonging for privileged and minoritized students: An emergent model. *Journal of College Student Development, 57*(8), 925-942.

U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). *Digest of Education Statistics* Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_326.10.asp

U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). *The Condition of Education 2015* (NCES 2015-144). Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015144.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2017). *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System College Navigator.* Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/

U.S. Department of the Treasury & U.S. Department of Education (2012). *The economics of higher education.* Retrieved from https://www.treasury.gov/connect/blog/Documents/20121212_Economics%20of%20Higher%20Ed_vFINAL.pdf

Van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Villalpando, O. (2003). Self-segregation or self-preservation? A critical race theory and Latina/o critical theory analysis of a study of Chicana/o college students. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(5), 619-646.

Walton, G.M. & Cohen, G.L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(1), 82 – 96.

White-Johnson, R.L. (2012). Prosocial involvement among African American young adults: Considering racial discrimination and racial identity. *Journal of Black Psychology, 38*(3), 313 – 341.

Yamamoto, E. (1997). Critical race praxis: Race theory and political lawyering practice in post civil-rights America. *Michigan Law Review*, 95(7), 821-900.

Yin, R.K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69-91.

Yosso, T. J., Parker, L., Solórzano, D. G., & Lynn, M. (2004). From Jim Crow to Affirmative Action and back again: A critical race discussion of racialized rationales and access to higher education. *Review of Research in Education, 28*, 1–25.

## APPENDIX A

## Participant Recruitment Email

Hello:

My name is Erin Hoffman and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois-Chicago in the Educational Policy Studies program. I am planning to conduct a qualitative research study titled, *Belonging or Exclusion: Exploring the Campus Racial Climate Experiences of Black Students at Traditionally White Liberal Arts Colleges.* The purpose of this study is to learn about the racial climate experiences of Black or African American college students at predominantly White liberal arts colleges. I hope the findings of the research will contribute to learning for college and university leaders working to foster student success and create inclusive campus communities.

The names of the participants will be kept completely confidential. Following the analysis of the study, all interview transcripts will be destroyed.

I plan to visit the campus of [Prairie College] from Friday, March 17 to Monday, March 20 and hope to schedule interviews with 6 [Prairie] students who self-identify as Black or African American, are at least 19 years old, and are in the sophomore, junior, or senior year.

Participation with this study will include one **face-to-face individual interview.** Here are additional details:

- The individual interviews should last approximately 90 minutes
- Participants will complete a brief demographic survey prior to the start of the interview
- Each participant will be interviewed separately
- The interview will be audio recorded
- I will transcribe interviews verbatim and participants will have a chance to review the transcribed interview
- A pseudonym will be the only name associated with the interviews
- A $15 Target or Amazon.com gift card will be given to the participant at the end of the interview as compensation for their time

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this study. I hope to hear back from you soon regarding your participation in this study. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erin M. Hoffman, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, Educational Policy Studies
University of Illinois-Chicago
ehoffm6@uic.edu, 303-246-3538 (cell phone)

## APPENDIX B

## Interview Protocol

**Background and Transition to College**
1. Can you tell me about where you grew up and what it was like to grow up there?
2. I am interested to know the reasons why you chose to attend this college? What factors contributed to picking this college?
3. What is your relationship like with your family and friends from your home community now that you are in college?
4. Describe your transition from high school to college.

**College Experience**
5. Tell me about the activities or organizations that you are involved with at this college.
6. Where have you made friends at college (in classes, residence hall, student organization)?
7. How would you describe your experience in your classes at this college?
8. Describe your interactions with your faculty.
9. Do you feel like there is a faculty or staff member who you trust and can talk to? Describe that interaction.

**Racial Climate**
10. Do you feel that diversity is a priority at this college? Why or why not?
11. How would you describe the racial climate at the college?
12. How do students of different cultural or racial backgrounds interact with one another?
     a. Are there differences in how students interact in classes versus outside of the classroom?
13. How do you see your racial identity or culture represented at the college?
14. How do you think you are perceived based on your racial identity or culture?
15. Can you think of a time when you felt like your culture was celebrated at the college? Describe that experience. How did that make you feel?
16. Can you think of a time when your culture was misrepresented or disrespected at the college? Describe that experience. How did that make you feel?
17. Do you ever see people trying to fit in to your culture? Describe that experience. How does that make you feel?
18. Is there one experience that best characterizes the racial climate at this college? Describe that experience.
19. Has your view of the racial climate or diversity changed while you have been in college? Please share how it has changed.

**Belonging**
20. I'm interested to know if there is a space or spaces where you feel you belong at the college?
     a. What are some of the activities there?

      b. Who are the people with you in those spaces?
21. Can you think of time when you felt out of place at the college?
      a. What was happening there?
      b. Who were some of the people that you were with?
22. Do you feel like you've found your "niche" or place at the College? Describe this.
      a. How do you know that this is your place?
      b. What feelings or experiences help you to know this?

**Success**
23. How do you define college success?
24. How would you rate your success in college so far?
25. What has contributed to your success in college?
26. Is there anything that has interfered with you achieving what you hoped to in college up to this point?
      a. What helped you move forward despite that challenge?
27. Is there anything that you believe would improve your experience at this college that you would like to share with me?

**Conclusion**
28. Do you have any questions for me about this research project?

**Informed Consent Document**

**Project Title:** Belonging or Exclusion: Exploring the Campus Racial Climate Experiences of Black Students at Traditionally White Liberal Arts Colleges

**Researcher:** Erin M. Hoffman **Faculty Sponsor:** David O. Stovall

**Introduction:** You have been invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Erin M. Hoffman as part of a doctoral dissertation. This dissertation research study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. David Stovall, Professor of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois – Chicago.

This research study is seeking to understand the experiences of Black students at predominantly white liberal arts colleges. You are being asked to participate in an effort to understand your experience with the racial climate at the college where you currently are an enrolled student. This research will involve at least six students from three liberal arts colleges in the Midwest. It is anticipated that there will be at least 15 participants.

Participants must be at least 19 years old, currently enrolled at [Prairie College], and identify as Black or African American.

Please read this form carefully. I welcome any questions that you may have before you decide if you would like to participate with this study.

**Purpose:** This research study is seeking to understand the experiences of Black students at predominantly white liberal arts colleges in order to challenge current perspectives on student success and retention and work towards creating more socially just and inclusive campuses.

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a short demographic survey and participate in one face-to face individual interview, which should last for approximately 90 minutes. The demographic survey asks for personal information about your identities including ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, etc., though responses are optional. This interview will focus on understanding your experience in college including your transition to college, your involvements in college, your experience with the campus racial climate, your feelings about belonging in the college environment, as well as factors related to your success as a college student.

During the individual interview, a semi-structured format will be followed. The researcher will ask you direct and indirect questions and you are invited to respond to these questions. You may decline to answer any of the questions throughout the interview. You may also ask the researcher any question that you have during the interview. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed to aid in the analysis. The audio files and transcribed data will be stored in an electronic format and will only be accessible to the researcher. Transcripts of the interview data will be shared with you to verify the accuracy of the information.

**Compensation for Participation:** You will be provided a $15 gift card for Amazon.com or Target for your time and participation with this research study. This gift card will be given to you at the end of the individual interview.

**Risks/Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, this research is intended to offer an indirect benefit to student participants. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of Black college students with the goal of identifying factors within the college environment the foster or inhibit success of Black students at predominantly white liberal arts colleges. The findings of this study will be shared with administrators and faculty at liberal arts colleges. Recommendations for changes to policies and practice will be suggested in an effort improve the experiences of Black college students and in order to create more inclusive college environments where needed.

While there are no foreseeable risks to participants anticipated with this research study beyond those ordinarily encountered in daily life; some questions will ask about situations which may cause you to reflect on negative experiences associated with your racial identity, which might cause some discomfort. Should you wish to speak to someone about any discomfort you experience as part of this interview, [Prairie College] students can contact staff in Counseling Services at [address and phone number included].

**Confidentiality:** You will be invited to select a pseudonym that will be used in all information that connects data to you as a participant both in the data analysis and when any information is shared via presentations or publications. A pseudonym will also be used for the institution and any organization or entity discussed as part of this research.

The audio recording and transcribed data will be stored electronically in a password-protected file. The audio records will be destroyed after the researcher transcribes the

recordings and replaces your name with a pseudonym. Only the researcher will have access to the raw data.

The researcher will be happy to answer any further questions about the research now or during the course of the project.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation with this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate or stop taking part in the study at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Even if you agree to participate in this study, you are free to decline answering any questions that are part of the research process. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will not affect any relationship with the University of Illinois-Chicago or any other college or university involved with this research.

**Contact Information:** If you have questions about this study, please contact:

Erin M. Hoffman  PhD Candidate, Educational Policy Studies, University of Illinois - Chicago ehoffm6@uic.edu, 303-246-3538 (cell)

David O. Stovall  Professor of Educational Policy Studies dostoval@uic.edu, 312-413-5014 (office)

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of Illinois-Chicago at 1-866-789-6215 (toll free) or email uicirb@uic.edu.

**Statement of Consent:** By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have had an opportunity to ask questions, you confirm that you meet the requirements to participate, and you agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant Signature_____ Date_____

Researcher Signature_____ Date_____

Do you agree to allow data collected from your participation in this study be included with publications or presentations associated with this research? Yes_____ No _____

# APPENDIX D

## Participant Demographic Survey

1. Name:_____

2. Home City: _____ State: _____ Country: _____

3. What year are you in school? First year_____ Sophomore _____ Junior_____ Senior _____

4. Do you live on-campus? Yes _____ No _____

5. What is your intended major(s)? _____

6. How do you identify racially?
   Black: _____
   African American: _____
   Caribbean American: _____
   Biracial: _____
   Multiracial: _____
   Other (please specify): _____

7. How do you identify your gender? _____

8. Were you born in the United States?  Yes _____  No _____

9. Do you identify with a religion? If so, which religion/faith? _____

10. How do you identify your sexual orientation? _____

11. What is your parent/guardian(s) highest level of education?

    Mother _____ Father _____ Guardian _____

12. Please describe your socioeconomic status or family's financial resources? _____
    _____

13. What types of activities are you involved with in college? (i.e. student organizations, Greek Life, community service, research with faculty, etc).
    _____

14. Do you have any disabilities that you would like to identify here?
    _____

15. Please select a pseudonym to be used for this research: _____

<div align="center">**VITA**</div>

**ERIN M. HOFFMAN**

---

## EDUCATION

---

**Doctor of Philosophy, Educational Policy Studies**                    **March 2018**
University of Illinois-Chicago, Chicago, IL

**Master of Arts, Higher Education Administration**                    **June 2007**
University of Denver, Denver, CO

**Bachelor of Science, Business-Sociology, minor in Communication**    **May 2003**
Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, NE

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

---

**Lake Forest College**                                        **July 2007 - Present**

    Interim Dean of Students                                   June 2017 - Present

    Assistant Dean of Students/Director of Intercultural Relations    June 2013 -May 2017

    Director of Intercultural Relations                        June 2011 - May 2013

    Interim Director of Intercultural Relations                June 2009 - May 2011

    Assistant Director of Intercultural Relations              July 2007 – May 2009

**University of Denver**                                        **June 2005–June 2007**

    Graduate Assistant, International Student and Scholar Services

## TEACHING

---

ETHC 250 (Ethics): Dialogue: Race, Ethnicity, Religion (Fall 2014, Fall 2015, Fall 2016)

ETHC 252 (Ethics): Dialogue Gender Identity (Spring 2015)

FIYS 188 (First Year Studies): Cultural Diversity and Dialogue (Fall 2013)

## SELECT PRESENTATIONS

---

Robinson, J. and Hoffman, E. (2016). *Cultivating First Generation Student Success in a Small College Environment.* NASPA IV-E/W Conference.

Hoffman, E. (2012). *Intercultural Model: Addressing Blurred Lines of Identity.* NASPA IV-E Annual Conference.

Golz, C. and Hoffman, E. (2011). *Gender Stereotypes and Perception of Leadership.* NASPA Women in Student Affairs Drive-in Conference.

Hoffman, E. and Pugh, S. (2010). *Transition Success through an Inclusive and Collaborative Pre-Orientation Program.* NASPA IV-E Annual Conference.

## PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT AND SERVICE

| | |
|---|---|
| Assoc. Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) Diversity Officers Committee, *Member* | 2009 - 2017 |
| ACM Diversity Officers Committee, *Executive Committee* | 2012 – 2015 |
| Association of International Educators (NAFSA), *Member* | 2007-Present |
| National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), *Member* | 2007–Present |